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LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

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THE WOMAN OF THE IRON BRACELETS

BY

FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF

'FOLLY MORRISON,' 'HONEST DAVIE,' 'FETTERED FOR LIFE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1893

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THE WOMAN OF THE IRON BRACELETS

CHAPTER I.

PROLOGUE.

The Honourable Clarence Spottiswoode is on the road to Epsom Downs in a hansom and in a very ill-humour. After waiting two hours beyond the appointed time for Captain Forsyth, a telegram had come from his gallant friend to say that he could not possibly get away and was 'awfully sorry.' In the first moment of vexation the Hon. Clarence said to himself that he wouldn't go at all to the hanged Derby ; but looking from his window down into the street he

saw the smart hansom there, with the luncheon-basket strapped on top, Cabby with a green veil round his white hat perched up behind, and the sleek horse champing his bit all in a flood of bright spring sunlight; and on reflecting that the only alternative to going alone to Epsom was to loaf about empty London all day in an equally solitary condition, he changed his mind and accepted what seemed to him the lesser of two evils. And now, just beyond Tooting, an accident happens to increase the young gentleman's displeasure —Cabby pulls up by the foot-path and gets down. A strap has broken: it can be mended in a couple of minutes with a piece of string; but the Hon. Clarence, whose power of endurance is by this time quite exhausted, springs out in disgust to take an angry turn up and down.

A few yards from where the cab is standing he comes to an open gate on

which is this notice : ‘ Private Road ; no thoroughfare.’ Looking down the private road, he fancies he sees at some little distance a pretty face craning over the high brick wall, and having an adventurous spirit, together with boundless impudence, he coolly strolls down the private road to satisfy his curiosity. Surely enough a girl is peering over the wall, and particularly pretty she looks up there with a background of budding lilac, and a ray of light playing on the waves of her nut-brown hair.

She owed a good deal to the position and surroundings. Looking up into a face one sees it with added charms, and hers in itself was not a typical pretty face—it was too thin and pale for that, and her eyes, though soft, were too deeply sunk. The eager hopefulness of her expression was not the buoyant gaiety of vivacious youth ; it had the pathetic shade of painful experience.

There was nothing coquettish in her appearance. Her hair was drawn back severely from her brow; but one strayed curl lay loosely on her temple. Her plain close-fitting dark dress was relieved only by rigid white cuffs and collar and the folds of a lace square thrown carelessly upon her shoulders. The Hon. Clarence couldn't make her out at all: she might be a governess or a hospital nurse, he thought; but the thing which perplexed him most was the unabashed yet not forbidding serenity with which she met his regard. She seemed to invite an advance on his part, and yet not the faintest tinge of a blush rose to her cheek. Was this the boldness of simplicity and innocence or the effrontery of a cool and practised flirt? Giving her the benefit of the doubt, he addressed her with easy assurance.

'You're on a tolerably high perch up there,' he remarked.

She nodded, and, speaking scarcely above a whisper, said :

'I can just see the carriages going past the end of the road. There have been a great many pass this morning—an hour ago.'

'Going to the Derby, you know. How is it you haven't gone with the rest of the world ?'

She bent down and replied in a still lower tone :

'Because no one has offered to take me.'

He was about to reply, when she raised her finger and glanced behind her in alarm. For a minute she stood motionless as a carved bust ; then, slowly relaxing, she turned, and bending forward nodded, and turned her ear for his answer.

'I've got a cab at the end of the road, you know,' he whispered. 'I'd offer to take you like a shot, if I thought you'd accept.'

'Do you really mean that?'

'By George, I should think I did!'

'How can I get down? Shall I jump?' she asked, quickly raising herself upon the wall.

'Stay a bit, for Heaven's sake! You can't do that. It's a seven-foot jump. You'll break your ankles, or do something awful.'

Glancing right and left of him for some easier place of descent, the Hon. Clarence caught sight of some building material a little lower down against the wall, which thereabouts needed repair. A short mason's ladder lay along the ground. Undaunted by the lawlessness of the proceeding and the certain ruin of his brand-new gloves, he picked up this limey ladder, carried it at arm's length to the place where the mysterious young lady was anxiously awaiting, and placed it in position. She, without a moment's hesitation, put her

hands upon the head of the ladder, stepped on to the wall, and descended with light celerity.

'By George, here's an adventure!' said the Hon. Clarence to himself. 'Better put that ladder back where I took it from, to avoid unpleasantness!' This was the only prudent thought that entered the young gentleman's head. It never occurred to him that he might be compromising a presumably-innocent young woman. Now, scruples did not trouble his conscience greatly—especially when they interfered with his amusements. Girls of to-day, he held, are a deuced deal smarter than we think. You never catch one of 'em going out of her depth, don't you know, unless she has learnt to swim and knows she is safe. And he saw no reason for making an exception to the rule in the present instance. This young lady was not a child, and she seemed quite able to take care of herself.

While he was removing the ladder to its place she deftly arranged her small lace shawl mantilla-fashion upon her head, taking one end under her chin and throwing it back over her shoulder, so that when she stepped into the cab there was nothing particularly remarkable in her appearance. Cabby certainly evinced no surprise; but he was a cabby who had learnt by experience not to be surprised at anything, and maybe, after mending his harness, he had cast an eye down the private road before settling himself in his seat.

The Hon. Clarence found conversation a rather one-sided business at first, his companion being too absorbed in her own reflections to take interest in his observations. But he did not mind that much. It was better to have even a silent companion than none at all; and this one was awfully pretty in his opinion, with her pale face, thrown into relief by the edging of black lace and

those fine dark eyes, unfathomably deep as the future on which they seemed to dwell. Anything was possible in a girl with a face like that—anything but the dull banality of ordinary girls.

Abruptly, as if she had suddenly decided some vexed question in her mind, and abandoned the subject in order to make herself more agreeable to the gentleman who had befriended her, she raised herself from the corner of the cab in which she had been leaning back, and looked about her with awaking interest.

First the inside of the cab and its appointments excited her curiosity, and then the wayside objects passing before her eyes in a long animated panorama furnished ever new subjects for observation. And about these commonplace and ordinary things she asked such strangely simple questions that the Hon. Clarence was forced to believe she had actually never before been in a hansom—he

doubted even if she had ever been outside that wall from which he had taken her. But upon these matters he could obtain no information from her.

'Do not ask me about that,' she said, when he put some questions referring to her past life; 'there are so many things that are pleasant to talk about.'

'Well, let us talk about yourself,' said he; 'I can think of nothing pleasanter, for you are awfully nice, you know.'

His gallantry went no further than this. She gave him no scope in that direction, seeming too greatly interested in impersonal matters to care for flattery and that sort of thing. For instance, just as he was thinking of improving on that allusion to her being so awfully nice she turned away to laugh at some village children who were cheering them as they passed. Was this simplicity or skilful tact? The Hon.

Clarence could not for the life of him decide, but he promised himself that it would be all right coming back after the champagne.

The girl's astonishment reached its climax when they came upon the Downs, and she saw and heard the mighty throng spread out about the racecourse. That sea of heads, and the roar that rose from it as the tiny coloured specks sped along the strip of green turf, awed her. She could ask no questions now. White and silent, she looked on with that far-away look in her eyes which was not less enigmatical to the Hon. Clarence than other phases in the character of his strange companion.

The impression passed away, and she became gay again by the time lunch was ready. She ate with good appetite, but she was very careful with the champagne. The Hon. Clarence could not induce her

to drink more than one glass. Evidently she knew the potency of wine, and wished to keep her head clear.

After lunch the Hon. Clarence brought her a race-card, and bade her choose a name from the list. She picked out a rank outsider; but, with a gambler's faith in the luck of a novice, he staked some money on the horse, and, half mad with excitement, came back with his hands full of gold as the result of her choice. He bade her choose again, telling her that he would stake his winnings this time for her. She selected another 'duffer,' and again the outsider won. This time he came back with his pockets full of gold.

'It's all for you,' he said: 'you've won it fair and square.'

She took the money without hesitation—eagerly. Her pocket would not hold all. He gave her his purse, which she filled, and put away in the bosom of her dress—

all in silence, with that look of intense purpose upon her face.

The last race was run, and they fell in with the stream of vehicles slowly moving from the Downs. Both were silent, for at last the serious side of this adventure was beginning to trouble the mind of the Hon. Clarence. She was the first to speak.

'Where are you going?' she asked, in a low voice, as if she scarcely dared to hear her own question.

'Well, I'm going back to my chambers in London, you know. But, I say, I've been thinking how the deuce will you manage to get over that wall? It'll be nearly dark, you know, and that gate may be shut.'

'It does not matter whether it is shut or open.'

'Oh! is there another way of getting in?'

'Not for me,' she said, almost fiercely;

and then, after a moment's silence, she added, with impressive firmness: 'I do not intend ever to go back there again.'

After that winning hazard he had called her his mascott—his luck-bringer. Ah, well—poor brainless lad!—perhaps there was more happiness in store for you that night than ever you had dreamed of.

CHAPTER II.

THE NIGHT OF MAY TWENTY-FOURTH.

The last up train should have left the terminus of the Wayford branch at 10.15, but at 10.30 it was still standing by the platform.

'You see, sir,' the guard explained, 'we can't start till the line is signalled clear. Very likely the main line's blocked along of the specials put on for the Derby. I can't tell; nobody here knows. P'raps,' he added jocosely, 'the signalman's forgot us—they gen'ally lose their heads on a day like this.'

'In that case,' said I to myself, 'we may think ourselves lucky if we don't lose ours.'

Indeed, the wonder is, when a system is disorganized by such an enormous increase of traffic as a big race meeting occasions, not that accidents happen, but that disaster is avoided.

With these reflections in my mind I strolled along the platform. Presently I noticed a knot of four or five persons standing with their heads together before a carriage at the end of the train. The light from the compartment fell upon their wondering faces. From idle curiosity I joined the group and looked in.

It was a second-class compartment—the last in the carriage and next to the brake van. The sole occupants were two policemen and a young woman, who sat between them with bowed head. I could not see her face, for she wore a kind of mantilla on her head, and the falling folds completely screened her features ; but I knew she was young by the lines of her figure and the

delicacy of her small hands folded upon her knee. The light of the lamp fell directly upon them, and the glint of bright steel showed that they were fettered by hand-cuffs—the iron bracelets, as they are called. Her close-fitting dress was well made and unsoiled, her hands were white and well kept: clearly she was not of the ordinary criminal class. And yet, as I knew, the iron bracelets are only used in cases of felony, and even then are only put upon the wrists of women when their character is dangerous. What had she done—this slight slip of a girl, for she seemed to me no more than that—to merit such strained precaution? Probably she had been arrested in the neighbourhood of Wayford, and was being removed from the local station to Sutton. But why? Sentiment, sympathy—some feeling surely higher than vulgar curiosity—impelled me to seek an answer to that question. I opened the door, intending to

travel in the same compartment with the unhappy girl, who sat there so silent and motionless, the incarnation of dread despair.

'You can't come in here, sir,' said one of the constables, rising and pulling the door to. Then, leaning out of the window as he turned the handle, he called out: 'Here, guard, just lock the door. If there's a bit of a rush at the junction we shan't be able to keep 'em out.'

The guard locked the door, and, pulling out his whistle, cried: 'Take your seats, please; going on.'

The signal had come. I stepped into the adjoining compartment, and as the guard closed the door he said cheerfully:

'He's recollected us at last, sir,' alluding to the signalman—one of those who 'gen'ally lose their heads on a day like this.'

But my thoughts ran in another direction now. I could only speculate upon the

future of the unhappy girl whose drooping figure stood imaged in my mind.

Another gentleman shared the compartment with me. 'Queer lot in there,' said he, jerking his head towards the partition.

'Do you know what she has done?' I asked.

'Can't make out. By the dusty look of the men, I should say they have been on the Downs all day. She doesn't look above eighteen or twenty at the outside.'

'I thought she was young, though I did not see her face.'

'Good-looking girl. Never imagine she was one of that sort. But you never know. Looks like one of those swell singing girls you find on the course.'

'What makes you think that?'

'Why, she has no gloves or hat on—nothing but that bit of lace. Good get-up for a high-class itinerant. They make a lot of money, I'm told; but she wanted to get

rich all at once, I suppose, by picking pockets.'

'Women are not handcuffed for theft.'

'Oh, I didn't know that.'

'Besides, Wayford is eight or ten miles from the Downs.'

'Yes; but it's only four from Banstead. She might have gone along the road in a trap, and struck off across country for safety.'

'Poor girl!'

'It's a bad look-out for her, to be sure. But I suppose we shouldn't pity her if she were old and ugly.'

'The victims of a disease, whether moral or physical, are to be pitied always; but surely it is more pitiful to see a child struck down——'

'Oh,' said he, interrupting me somewhat contemptuously, 'you regard pocket-picking as a disease?'

'Certainly, sir!' said I warmly. 'I hope

it is natural neither to you nor to me to be dishonest, but it might have been otherwise had we inherited vicious propensities or lived under the influence of unhealthy circumstances. I see no difference between moral and physical disease, except in the treatment, and that difference is disgraceful alike to our humanity and to our intelligence. We build hospitals, we improve the sanitary conditions of dwellings, we endow faculties to alleviate the sufferings of physical weakness; but those who are morally affected we throw into prisons tainted with every germ of corruption, and after subjecting them to a certain term of pollution we turn them out ten times worse than they were when we took them in hand.'

'Oh, that sort of thing, you know, is incurable.'

'That is precisely what was said of insanity a hundred years ago. And with that excuse they chained up the insane in

Bedlam and goaded them into the worst form of madness. All that is changed, and we know now that nothing is incurable—except the stupidity of those who have neither brains nor hearts.'

My companion did not seem to relish this last home-thrust, for he closed the argument with a supercilious jerk of the head, and, taking up his paper, set himself to read it by the flickering light of the lamp.

I was following up my own line of thought in silence, when the carriage gave a violent lurch, and the train came to an abrupt stand after a succession of short, sharp jerks. My companion and I, sitting with our backs to the engine, were thrown from our seat by the sudden shock, but without receiving any serious hurt, and the next moment we were craning out of the windows to learn what had happened. I know now that in crossing the points where the branch makes a junction with

the main line, the engine and four or five coaches had run off the line ; but I could make out nothing then but a long row of heads projecting from the windows, and a glow from the open fire-box of the engine upon the steam that was blowing off. No one seemed greatly alarmed ; indeed, some of the passengers treated it as a joke, and bandied feeble pleasantries about the horse falling down, the driver stopping for a drink, and so on. There was nothing to indicate that our position was perilous until the guard ran along the down-line with a red lamp in his hand. He had scarcely passed the brake-van, when he stumbled over a sleeper and fell, extinguishing the light. There was a coarse laugh at his expense from one of the windows, but all merriment ceased as a passenger, springing down from a carriage, shouted ;

'Out, out, for God's sake! The mail's coming!'

Cries of terror, oaths, screams—a very babel of voices followed, running down the train with the swiftness of wildfire—men and women blocking the doors and fighting to escape from the peril of death. A constable in the next compartment was shaking the door frantically, the one he had made the guard lock at Wayford. Failing to open it, he scrambled out head forwards through the window, and his comrade followed.

'That fettered girl!' I said to myself, as I leaped down on the rails.

'The mail's coming—you can hear it!' cried one of the men as he rose to his feet, and they rushed away with the rest who were flying from the coming catastrophe.

The woman stood at the window now, her fettered hands stretched forth imploringly. I wasted a moment stupidly in the vain attempt to wrench the door open; then a thought, which would have occurred

to most people not under the maddening influence of panic, struck me—the door on the other side might be unlocked. I crossed the line between the coach and the brake-van. As I bent down to pass under the couplings, my ear nearing the metals, I also heard the mail coming, the grinding hum of wheels that might still be a mile distant, and yet give me but a bare minute to save the imprisoned girl from certain destruction.

As I came out from beneath the carriage a woman rushed towards me, crying in hysterical joy, 'George, George!' but finding that I was not the man she sought, she turned away, calling again, 'George, George!' but now in a tone of frantic despair. I warned her to save herself, but the warning was useless. The man she sought was dearer to her than life itself. I could do no more for her; the woman I had set myself to save was still in jeopardy.

I sprang on the footboard and turned the handle. Thank God, the door on this side was unlocked ! I tore it open, and cried to the girl to save herself. She had relinquished all hope, and sunk upon the seat paralyzed with terror. The light of the lamp fell upon the white face and wide-expanded eyes. There was no time to notice her features ; but the expression of terrible resignation to an inevitable fate upon them made an impression on my mind which I shall never forget. At my call she rose to her feet, tottered forward, and then, her limbs failing her, she fell upon her knees, stretching her manacled hands out towards me in silent supplication. The constables—to their credit be it said—had made an attempt to release the girl before panic, the irresistible instinct of self-preservation, overcame them. The key was in the handcuffs. I saw that as I sprang into the compartment, and with one turn I released

that wrist. Dragging at the other cuff, her hand slipped through, and both were free. Liberty restored energy to her, and she needed no further help. We leapt down upon the rails.

The hum had now risen to a roar; the mail was close upon us. I saw the red light shoot into sight as it rounded the curve, and at the same instant the brake and whistle screamed in hideous unison. The woman looking for her George was on the footboard, peering into the next compartment. As she stepped down I caught hold of her wrist and pointed to the red light. With a scream of terror she tore away from me and leapt again on the footboard, still clinging to that last vain hope of finding her loved one.

The other woman I dragged away unconscious of what I did, of whither I was going. The light from the flaming eyes of the shrieking monster close upon us blinded

me; its mingled hiss and roar seemed to stun me. Stumbling over a single rod, we toppled forward and rolled down the embankment as an awful crash above brought horror to its climax.

We rose to our feet, and stood for some moments appalled by the comparative silence that followed the catastrophe. It seemed as if none had escaped death in the wreck. Then a scream broke the silence, and as if awoke from their stupor by this cry other sufferers raised their voices in shrieks of pain and pitiful appeals for help. That sound brought vigour to my benumbed wits, and prompted me to immediate action. There was need up there for all the medical skill that I possessed.

The girl had found her way to my side, and was clutching my arm with trembling hands.

'You are not hurt?' I asked.

'No, no—but listen.'

'Yes, yes. I must go up there—I am a doctor.'

'And I——'

'A woman can do nothing in a wreck like that. There will be hands enough to help when they are needed. Save yourself!'

She released my arm and I left her.

Groping my way along the foot of the embankment to find some easier point to scale it, I had gone but a few yards, when I was arrested by a groan coming from the darkness before me.

'Who's there?' I asked.

'Only me, sir,' a man's voice gasped; and then, as if feeling it to be his duty to report himself, he added with painful effort, 'John Evans, fireman of the express—chucked off somehow just as she struck.'

'Hurt?'

'Leg broke, I think.'

'I'm a doctor; let me see what I can do for you.'

I felt my way to his side, straining my eyes, which every moment accommodated themselves more to the obscurity.

'If you could only put me on my back, sir, I'd be all right,' he groaned.

'We'll soon do that, Evans,' said I, passing my hands lightly over him.

I found that one leg was badly fractured and bent under him. Laying it out as tenderly as I could, I turned him over on his back, and then, whipping off my light overcoat, I rolled it up and tucked it under his head for a pillow.

'How's that, Evans?'

'First-class, sir, and thank you kindly. Don't you waste no more time over me—there's them as needs you more, sir. Hark at 'em, poor things!'

As I rose the shadowy figure of a woman approached, and as I turned away she knelt down, taking my place by the fireman's side.

'Ay, ay!' said I to myself. 'You wouldn't have been a true woman if you had followed my advice at a time like this.' For though I could distinguish no more than the dim silhouette of her figure, I felt sure that this was the girl whom I had rescued.

I soon forgot her and everything else but the work before me when I got upon the line. It was difficult to know how to begin; for where light was most needed every lamp had been extinguished, and the obscurity was made more intense by a dense smoke that hung over the wreck. I could just make out the overturned engine by the dull glow of the scattered fire and the smouldering woodwork breaking here and there into sluggish flame; and there it was useless to look for the wounded—none could have escaped death at that point of impact. But before long lamps were brought from the end carriages, and soon after fires were

lit along the edge of the line from the splintered fragments of the wreck. A terrible scene of disaster and confusion was revealed by the ruddy glare of these fires. The carriages struck by the engine were crushed up like match-boxes, and formed a shapeless heap ; those that followed had been telescoped one within another, and behind them the body of one carriage stood on end, bolt upright. All—even the massive engine and its tender smashed together —looked like the broken playthings of a giant. Men were climbing over the débris, rushing madly from one point of horror to another, tearing away fragments of woodwork with the conflicting hope and fear of finding their missing friends ; and all along the wreck there rose heartrending cries and frantic appeals for help.

But amongst those not distracted by emotion were many who combined to give practical help to the suffering. Cushions

were brought from the carriages and laid in the light, lining was torn into strips for bandages, and splints fashioned from the broken woodwork. And with the help of those good men and such rude means as were at hand, I did something to lessen the immediate suffering of the wounded as they were brought to me, and prepare them for removal, working steadily on until a special train brought a properly equipped medical staff to relieve me.

I was glad to slip quietly away, feeling now quite exhausted by the mental and physical strain of the last hour.

A huge fire was burning where the scattered fuel from the express engine had ignited the pile of fragments which I have likened to crushed match-boxes. There was no water to extinguish the flames, but a dozen men were occupied in wrenching away flaming portions from the mass—a proceeding which, by leavening the mass

and admitting air, only served to increase the activity of the fire.

'What on earth are they doing that for?' I asked of a man who was standing apart.

'Oh, they say there's a woman under there. A couple of policemen had her in custody. They were in the end carriage. But the woman fainted away with the fright, and they had to leave her in the compartment to save themselves, and a narrow escape it was for them at that, it seems. But what they're trying to get her out for I can't tell. She must have been killed an hour ago.'

At this moment some of the workers gathered about something they had found, and called to the policemen, who joined them. They had found a charred and scarcely recognisable vestige of humanity.

'That's her,' declared one of the constables.

It occurred to me at once that these must be the remains of the woman whom I had

seen at the very moment of the collision, seeking the man she called George. 'What good purpose will it serve if I undeceive the constables?' I asked myself. The question brought back to my mind for the first time the girl I had left at the foot of the embankment, and it seemed to me much more to the purpose to find her than to set the police right.

I groped my way through the smoke down the steep declivity. At the bottom the smoke clung to the earth in a dense cloud. I could see nothing.

'Are you here, Evans?' I called, remembering the wounded fireman now.

'Here am I,' he answered, and, guided by the sound of his voice, I presently reached his side. He was alone.

'How are you getting on, eh?'

'First class, sir, thanks to the young lady. She's been more like an angel than anything else. Been a-bathing my face with a wet

handkerchief whenever I felt a bit faint, and saying such cheerful, comfortin' things to me when I seemed like goin' off, that I felt it would be regular ungrateful to give in.'

'She has not been gone long, then?' said I, very contented to know that my *protégée* had behaved so well.

'Not a minute, sir. She had her soft little hand on my forehead when you called.'

A faint, muffled sound near at hand, like that of one trying to subdue the choking influence of the thick smoke, caught my ear. I stepped forward, and saw faintly that slight figure before me. Without attempting to penetrate further the obscurity in which she seemed to wish to screen herself, I said in a low voice :

'I am going to call men to remove Evans. You can do no more for him. Whatever your sin has been, it is expiated by this deed

of mercy. Go now, and God be with you.'

She waited yet a moment, as if irresolute, and then her shadowy figure faded away from my sight.

CHAPTER III.

MAY TWENTY-FIFTH.

I WAITED some three or four minutes after that figure had vanished into the night, and then I called out to those on the line above that here lay a poor fellow in need of immediate attention. A doctor came down with attendants carrying surgical appliances and a powerful lamp. Splints were adjusted to the fractured leg and Evans was laid on a stretcher. I took up my coat, which had served him as a pillow, and, following the party with their burden, I unrolled it and slipped it on. Then I noticed a curious thing. Something chinked in one of the

pockets, and, slipping in my hand, I found there the handcuffs I had taken from the wrists of the fettered girl. I stopped in amazement. Whether they had dropped in the gaping pocket by sheer accident, or whether by some unaccountable freak of habit I had slid them unconsciously in at that moment of direst peril, I cannot say; but there they were. It was a dangerous possession. What should I do with the things? To fling them away haphazard might betray the girl's escape. On the other hand, it would avert suspicion if I went up on the line and thrust them surreptitiously into the burning wreck of the splintered carriage; but this latter course smacked too strongly of downright deception to be quite palatable, and so for want of a better alternative I resolved to let them lie where they were and take them home with me.

A special train was waiting at a short

distance from the scene of the disaster to take the remaining passengers on to London. Coming into the light of the lamps, I looked at my watch. It was a quarter-past twelve.

'There'll be no getting home to-night,' said I to myself; 'I shall have to sleep in London;' and dropping my hands in my pockets with this unpleasant reflection, I was again reminded of the escaped prisoner by the cold, smooth touch of the iron bracelets. Then I asked myself, Where would she sleep? Where find a shelter at this time of night? If she reached a village, would she have the courage to knock at the door of an inn and demand admittance? Without confessing that she had escaped from the wreck of the train, how could she explain her being there at this hour and in that condition? For I recollected that she had no mantle nor any covering for her head but a piece of lace.

And now it occurred to me for the first time that she could have no money—for her pockets would have been emptied by the police. I ought to have thought of this before sending her away; it is but a poor excuse to say that at such times one cannot think of everything. Without money it seemed to me inevitable that she must again fall into the hands of the police.

'Going on, sir?' asked the guard, coming up to me.

'No; I prefer to walk,' said I, and then, pointing in the direction taken by the girl, I asked: 'Is there a road out that way?'

'There's a lane just under the bridge there that strikes the main road to Sutton on the right, about a hundred yards on.'

'And Sutton—how far is that?'

'About three miles.'

I thanked the man, bade him good-night, and scrambling once more down the

embankment, said to myself that if the poor girl had by chance taken this road, I might, by stepping out briskly, overtake her, and then make amends for my want of forethought.

There were two or three traps standing in the lane, the news of the accident having brought many people hither from Sutton. One man was preparing to go, and seeing me as I climbed over the fence, he asked if he could give me a lift. I accepted his offer readily, thinking this would give me a better chance of overtaking the girl. The lamps of the gig shed a bright light on both sides, and I devoted my attention chiefly to scanning the road, making my friend very poor return for his kindness; but we reached Sutton without passing a single wayfarer. Clearly the fugitive had followed the lane in the other direction, or was wandering still in the dewy fields; and feeling that it was now hopeless to go back

and continue my search, I reluctantly decided to give up the quest, and so accepted the hospitality of my obliging acquaintance, who, I found, was proprietor of the George Hotel. And there I passed the night—wretchedly enough, to be sure; for my fitful sleep was made horrible by confused recollections of the ghastly scenes I had witnessed, and through them all my mind was haunted by the figure of that unhappy girl as I had last seen her—a shadow, fading away into the night.

Even now, sitting here at home in my snug study, a bright fire burning for the sake of cheerfulness on my left hand, the light of the reading-lamp shining on my books and comfortable surroundings (with ruby reflections in a glass of old burgundy), that phantom rises before me, and a voice from the infinite whispers reproachfully, 'You have all that can make you happy, but what of me, whom you might have

rescued by a little thought? Where shall I lay my head to-night? What shall become of me when my strength fails, and hunger goads me to desperation? Poor fugitive! wandering in the night, shall I ever see you again, except as a vision of the past—ever hear one word of your fate?

Let me think of other things, if I may. What has happened to-day? Little, indeed, that is not dwarfed to insignificance by the events of last night. And yet the day has not passed without strong appeals to my feeling.

It was mid-day when I arrived at Boro' Green. As the train slowed up by the platform I caught sight of my little friend Olive St. John standing there alone looking eagerly into the compartments as they passed before her. In her plain gray dress, and hat unrelieved by any touch of bright colour or ornament, such as most young women of her station wear, and with the

subdued and careworn expression upon her young face, she looked more like a domestic servant than a young lady of fortune—a plain, unnoticeable little body to most people, I dare say, but a very sweet and interesting person to me, who have known her twenty years or more, since she was young enough to take up in my arms. Seeing me as I stepped from the carriage, the expression of strained anxiety on her face gave place to a bright smile, as she came quickly to meet me.

'Oh, I am so glad to see you, Dr. Harvey!' she said, giving me both her little hands impulsively, and a tear suffusing her soft brown eyes to attest her sincerity. 'I could not help feeling very troubled after reading the paper this morning, for you told me you were going to Wayford yesterday, you know, and I felt sure you were in that dreadful accident; though,' she added, with a little laugh, as she linked her arm in

mine, 'that ought to have set my mind at rest.'

'Why, how so?' I asked in perplexity.

'Oh, I can read between the lines; and when the reporter in the *Times* said, "Before the arrival of the official medical staff, prompt and immediate relief was given to the wounded by a gentleman obviously of the medical profession, who declined to give his name," I said to myself at once, "That is my Dr. Harvey"—and I was right, wasn't I?'

'My dear,' said I, 'I have forty-two patients on my list, mostly ladies, and if it be known that I was in this accident, I shall offend everyone of them unless I give each a detailed account of the particulars, and, believe me, they are so terrible to look back upon, that I would give anything to get them out of my mind.'

She pressed my arm in sympathy, assuring me that she had imparted her fears to no

one, and would keep my secret as if it were her own.

'Besides,' she added, 'who could I tell? I have no friend but you; that is why——'

She stopped, her chin twitched, and bowing her head, she sought her handkerchief to wipe away the tear that was stealing down her cheek.

Poor child! thought I, to think that one so young should weep at the thought of losing a friend so old as I.

'Come, my dear,' said I, 'I see your carriage waiting outside; but we'll take another turn down the platform before we part, and we will talk of other things.'

She put away her handkerchief, shaking her head resolutely as we turned about; but the elasticity was gone from her step, and the careworn, wistful look was on her face again as she said in a low voice:

'Yes, Dr. Harvey; there is something I want to tell you: I have seen Harry.'

'Your brother!' I ejaculated in astonishment.

'Yes; looking so old and so altered.'

'Why, it must be five years since you saw him last.'

'Nearly; but looking so handsome still, though he was dressed quite like a poor working man.'

'When did you see him?'

'This morning, about nine o'clock. Papa went out to him in the hall.'

I have observed that Olive never fails to speak of Mr. Lawson as her papa, although he is only her step-father, and I suspect that this is in compliance with the expressed wish of her mother.

'Papa held out his hand, but Harry thrust his in his pockets, and said: "I have come to see my mother, and not you, Mr. Lawson." "Your mother emphatically declines to see you, I regret to say," said papa; "but if I can do anything for

you——" "Tell my mother," said Harry, "that by a miscalculation I have lost fifty pounds more on the Derby than I have means to pay; and as this is a debt of honour, I am constrained to ask her for the sum I need." Papa left him, and was absent some minutes. When he returned he said: "I am sorry to say, Harry——" "Mr. St. John, if you please!" cried Harry angrily. "Mr. St. John," said papa meekly, "that your mother, upon principle, declines to accede to your request. She will not countenance gambling by paying any debts you incur upon the turf. I need not say that I take a somewhat broader view of the case, and shall be happy, from my own limited resources, to save you from disgrace. Therefore ——" He had taken out his pocket-book, but Harry stopped him. "I will suffer any disgrace but that of accepting money from your hand, Mr. Lawson," said he; and with that he turned

his back upon papa, and went out of the house.'

'And where were you all this time, my dear?' I asked, after reflecting awhile.

'Upon the stairs. I was coming down when I saw Harry waiting below.'

'And you stood there without moving?'

'Like one spell-bound.'

'But surely your love for Harry must have prompted you to run down and throw yourself in his arms?'

'It did—it did—it did!' she replied, in a painful crescendo. 'I kept thinking of the old days when we used to hunt together in the woods for orchids—of the nest of dormice we found—of all the old times when we did nothing but laugh and romp like little savages; and I longed to go down to him and hug him in my arms again. I tried to go—I tried to call his name that he might come to me; but my limbs were powerless, my tongue was tied just as in a

dream, when you strive to move and speak in vain.'

'But, my dear child——'

'Oh, doctor, I am a miserable little coward! I dared not!'

I was silenced by this. What was it she feared? What terror overpowered the yearning impulse of her heart? What mysterious influence prevailed in the gloomy house which benumbed alike the very souls of the mother and the sister? The girl trembled now, as if that terror was still present.

'But I thought,' she pursued, after a moment's silence, 'that Harry would not go away without seeing you; and I want you to give him this.' She slipped a poor little purse into my hand, bulging with silver and pence. 'It is all I have; and tell him that I saw him, and that I do love him,' she sobbed, 'with all my soul.'

Then, with painful alarm on her face, as

though she feared discovery, she wished me hurriedly good-bye, saying that she had to go to Plaxtol for her mother, and left me. The carriage, drawn by a beautiful pair of bays, was in movement as I reached the outer door, and I saw my poor little friend's face turned towards me with pathetic timidity in her smile.

Something is radically wrong with the household at Higham Court. Where is the seat of the disease? I asked myself as I stepped out along the Wrotham Road. The question has occurred to me again and again during the past ten years, and now the mystery is as inexplicable as ever.

CHAPTER IV.

MAY TWENTY-FIFTH TO JUNE SIXTEENTH.

'GOOD-MORNING,' said I, as my man opened the door to me. 'Anyone called?'

'Yussir; Mr. St. John, sir. He is in your workshop, sir. Shall I inform him that you have returned?'

'No. Give me my garden coat and hat, Morton. I will go to Mr. St. John.'

The very thought of my workshop, where I spend the happiest hours of my life, put me in good-humour, and the prospect of my finding my friend Harry there, whom I have loved from his early boyhood, added to my cheerfulness. I whipped off my stiff hat, and was stripping off my overcoat with

like celerity, when once more the clink of steel reminded me of the iron bracelets. In the corner of my study is a cabinet, in which I keep all sorts of queer odds and ends, natural curiosities, souvenirs of lost friends and such things, and here, on an empty hook, I hung the handcuffs.

'Your coat and hat, sir,' said Morton, as I turned from the cabinet. He is always scrupulously careful to enter a room and to move about the house without noise. 'You will take lunching at the hornary hour, sir?'

'We will say half-past one to-day,' said I, looking at my watch.

'Shall I lie the table for two, sir?' The poor fellow tries his utmost to be correct in all things.

'Yes; and you will bring up a bottle of Graves from No. 2 bin and a bottle of Margaux from No. 3.'

With these instructions I slipped on my

alpaca and trotted down the steps that led from my study into the garden. Lord! how sweet and fresh everything looked—the roses showing colour here and there, the old red walls patched with the white and pink bloom of the trained fruit-trees, and some late flowering spring bulbs mingling their perfume with the scent of wall-flowers and the opening lilac. But I gave them no more than a passing glance, and barely peeped into the greenhouse, where my orchids seemed to beckon me in to admire them, and I did not even pause to see how the peas were coming on as I hurried through the kitchen-garden, so eager was I to reach my workshop, which stands on the edge of the orchard. I ran up the steps, and there in the long well-lit room I found Harry with a mallet in one hand and a chisel in the other, working at the bench before the open window. Standing in the doorway, I regarded him for a moment in silence, for the

tap of the mallet had made my step inaudible to his ear, and he was unconscious of my presence. Like a good workman, he had taken off his coat, and stood in his shirt-sleeves, a splendid type of vigorous manhood — full, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, thin in the flank, well-knit, and set up firmly on his straight legs. I had him in profile—the light beyond throwing up the outline of his straight forehead, strong aquiline nose, and short Vandyke beard. There was the lustre of health in the wave of his dark hair. But what struck me most with admiration was the sure, vigorous blow of his mallet, and none but a man who knows what he has to do and feels the power to do it can drive a chisel home like that. I wish I could!

I stepped noiselessly behind him and looked at his work. He was cutting the scroll in high relief for a chimney-piece that I had begun; but, dear me! the difference

between his carving and mine—his so bold and decisive, mine so wriggly and tentative —made my heart sink for a moment, but it rose again the next moment with admiration of his skill, and the reflection that he owed his first knowledge of the art to me.

'Well done!' said I, clapping him on the shoulder as he paused to blow aside a chip.

'What, Doctor!' he exclaimed, turning about. Then, flinging aside the mallet, he took my hand and held it in a hard, honest grip, as we looked into each other's eyes with affectionate warmth. The boyishness was gone from his face, in his deep-sunk eyes and meagre cheeks there were signs of hardship and endurance; but the tender sensibility and perfect candour which endeared him to me in his childhood were there still. There was no mistaking the honesty of those deep gray eyes nor the sweet disposition in the curve of the facial muscles.

'I've been forgetting ten years of my life—twenty, as for that,' he said, glancing out of the window, and ranging the view with that tender smile on his face. 'There are the rooks still hovering over the elms down there. Old Kirby's mill grinding on the same as ever, and the grand old weald stretching away to the blue unblemished by the hand of the speculative builder. Nothing changed. Why, do you know,' he continued, with a laugh, brushing some chips from his beard and half seating himself on the bench, 'when I looked round just now and found myself alone, the thought struck me that I might sneak down and steal gooseberries just as I did when I was a little nipper about so high.' He swung his foot to the level of the bench.

'Why, Hal, you never stole anything in your life.'

'Oh, haven't I, though; and I was sly enough to do it without discovery.'

'But, my dear boy, I never refused to let you have gooseberries.'

'Yes, green ones, Doctor. And that was the very fruit I coveted—because it was forbidden, I suppose. Nothing changed,' he added, casting his eye round the workshop, 'since those blessed days when I used to come up here and take the edge off your tools. Took you all your time to sharpen them, and you couldn't make out what was the matter with them till you found out that I had been trying my 'prentice hand on your old oak wardrobe, and then I'm hanged if your anger held out five minutes.'

'Why, Hal, it did not need the patience of Job nor the wisdom of Solomon to forgive that which anyone could foresee would lead you to do better things one day. And I was right, hey? You ought to be making a fortune now, with your skill in wood-carving.'

'Oh, thanks to you, Doctor, I can pay

my way—except when I make an idiotic blunder, like that which obliges me now to ask you for the loan of fifty pounds. Can you let me have it without inconvenience?'

'With all my heart,' said I; 'and if you wish to repay me with interest you can come down here and finish that chimney-piece for me. For to tell you the truth, I shall never have the courage to go on with it now you have shown me how it should be done. By-the-bye, I have something for you, Hal. I met Olive at the station, and she bade me give you this, and tell you that she does love you with all her soul.'

'Poor little Olive! poor little Olive!' said he, with a deeply pathetic accent as he opened her purse. 'All her savings—more pence than anything else, and the more precious for that—dear little soul! Do you know, Doctor,' he added, after a pause, in which he silently and slowly

closed the purse, 'I think the only unkind thing you ever did in your life was to prevent Olive running away from home with me ten years ago.'

'My dear boy—she was but a child, and you only a lad.'

'I know. You had reason and everything else on your side. I only judge the act by the result.'

'It might have been better for her, I admit,' said I; 'but how could it have been better for you?'

'It would have given me something to work for besides myself—some object to strive for other than the gratification of caprices, mostly idle, sometimes mischievous.'

'But surely, Hal, you have some ambition?'

'Not a spark.'

'Art in itself is an object to incite one to efforts.'

'If one is an artist with the genius to create ideals, yes. But I'm not an artist—only a skilled workman, with all the illusions of youth knocked out of him.'

I sighed to think of a young fellow of thirty thinking in this despondent fashion, and then I said:

'If you have no one to work for just now, there will be one of these days, I warrant. You'll be wanting to take a wife before long, my boy.'

'What for?'

'What for? Why, to have a cheerful companion, a——'

'As far as my observation goes, that is the want the wife fails to supply. When they are not nagging, their most lively topics of conversation are utterly without interest for any reasoning man, for they seem incapable of thinking about anything but what they shall wear, what they shall eat, and how they shall kill time. If young

fellows would only look at their sweethearts a little less, and examine their prospective mothers-in-law more closely, realize the situation, and say to themselves, "Now, that's the sort of thing I have to look forward to," what a lot of early and unfortunate marriages would be avoided!'

'Ha, ha, my boy, you'll think very differently of the sex when you fall in love,' said I.

'I feel pretty safe about that, Doctor; for up to now I've never seen the girl I should care to fall in love with;' and then he added slyly, 'Have you?'

'A hundred,' I affirmed stoutly.

'And you liked them all so well that you could never afford to give up ninety-nine for the sake of one—the surest way to see them all at their best.'

'I don't like to hear you talk like this. I would rather you thought as you did ten years ago—that every pretty girl was

an angel; and surely there are angels amongst them.'

'There may be, but they know their value too well to throw themselves away upon a mere artisan.'

'Nonsense! In the middle class of society——'

'Oh, the middle class!' he said, impatiently interrupting me. 'I would rather marry an absolutely wicked woman than one who could neither rise above nor sink below the dead level of respectability. Besides, if I found an angel disinterested enough to accept me for a husband, it would be unfair to take advantage of her amiability—supposing I wanted to marry. You think of me as I was—an eager, impulsive, enthusiastic lad, with boundless faith in myself and others; not as I am—a dull, disappointed man. Do I seem like a fellow that could make a fool of himself for the sake of a woman?'

'You certainly do not,' I said, with a sigh.

'A convincing proof that I'm not worth the love of a woman.'

He turned aside on the bench as if to close the subject, which was clearly distasteful to him, and his eye, wandering over the hop-fields, fell upon the distant village of Ightham, with its gray, square church tower, and the park at the back of Higham Court, the place where he was born and had lived until he turned his back on it ten years ago.

'Poor little Olive!' he murmured. 'Do you go over there often, Doctor?'

'Not so often as I should like to, but as often as I dare. You see, Hal, I'm not altogether a welcome guest there. Your mother prefers the professional advice of Dr. Heath, and so I have only the excuse of an old friend for visiting. The bent of my sympathies is known, and it is clear that I call chiefly to see Olive, which cannot be

agreeable either to your mother or Mr. Lawson. Mr. Lawson is always excessively bland and gracious——'

'A fawning hypocrite!'

'I am afraid he is. But his assumed amiability gives me a pretext for calling which otherwise I should not have, for your mother obviously dislikes me.'

'Good heavens! And in my father's lifetime you were next to him her dearest friend.'

'Next to her husband and her children.'

'And her children! I had almost forgotten that she loved me—it is so long ago; the change has been so great. Have you ever found a clue to the mystery?'

'None that I have not already given you. She was always an over-sensitive, highly-excitable woman. She loved your father intensely, and the shock of his death seemed to snap an overstrung chord in her nervous temperament. And that came at a critical

period of her life, so that there are physical as well as psychical causes for this aberration to be taken into account.'

'But that her love for me should turn to hatred—that she should marry a man like Lawson, a man who had not a single one of those virtues which endeared my father to her!'

'We regard him from our own point of view, not your mother's. To her he may have revealed some lovable side of his nature which is hidden from us. In her desolation she sought the consolation of religion; undoubtedly the incumbent of St. Andrew's administered that consolation. He was a widower, and in her widowhood your mother may have found some bond of union in their common sympathy.'

'Could sympathy with him create unnatural antipathy to me?'

'No; but your hatred of Mr. Lawson undoubtedly tended to weaken her love for

you. Remember, you were not blameless. You openly insulted him, you were insolent and overbearing with him before your mother, harsh and unforgiving to her——'

'I admit all that; but yet a great deal has to be accounted for. It is not alone the complete overthrow of maternal tenderness and regard that is inexplicable, but the breakdown of all principle and good faith. My father was the last man in the world who would do his children an injustice. Only his unbounded confidence in his wife's maternal love, and the wisdom that springs from such love, could have induced him to leave all his property to her. He intended that she should bestow at least a part of it upon us when we came of age.'

'As undoubtedly she would but for the influence of her second husband.'

'And you can only explain her yielding to that influence by her love for him?'

'I can find no other explanation.'

'I can. It is fear. Terrorism is the influence at work there,' said he, folding his arms and looking under his knitted brows at the half-hidden walls of Higham Court. 'And as he crushed the love of me from my mother's heart, so he is crushing the love and courage of my poor little Olive. Why, think, Doctor,' he pursued, turning to me, 'at a word she would have fled the house, child as she was, and joined me ten years ago, if you had not opposed it.'

I assented with a remorseful nod.

'And yet, when she came to an age when she was free to do as she wished, no prayers of mine could induce her to leave that cursed place. And she could not give a reason for her refusal.'

'May we not find one for her, my boy—in the affection and pity she may feel for her mother—in a noble determination to stand by her in adversity?'

'It may be so. There are women capable

of more self-sacrifice than such a selfish wretch as I can dream of.'

'You might have helped her, Harry.'

'Is it too late now, Doctor?' he said, springing up, with a flash of the old impetuosity in his face.

'We will see,' said I. 'To-morrow I will go to the Court.'

I promised him before he left me to write and let him know the result of this visit. If I can persuade the girl to leave the Court, I will; but I fear the attempt is nothing more than a forlorn hope.

* * * * *

I called at Higham Court this morning for the third time since Harry was here. On each occasion I have been met by Mr. Lawson, and always with the same urbanity, but I have not caught even a glimpse of Olive or her mother. It seems as if Mr. Lawson has divined the object of my visit (so soon after Harry's appearance at the

Court), and is purposely keeping them out of my way.

* * * * *

A strange event has happened, which may prove a turning-point in the life of Harry St. John, with what issue I scarcely dare to speculate upon. Early this morning I received a telegram from him, asking me briefly to come to him. This is the first word he has sent me since we met three weeks ago; I noticed that the address was not the same he gave me then. The telegram was itself a proof of the urgency of the case; so I bustled about, and had the good luck to just catch the next up-train. Getting out at Brixton, I asked my way to Arlingford Terrace, which I found was a row of small modern houses, each with a bay window, a portico, a flight of steps, and a small forecourt. I knocked at No. 16, and the door was presently opened by a decent, motherly woman, who, in reply to my

inquiry, informed me that Mr. St. John had just stepped out.

'But,' said she, 'may I ask if you're the new doctor?'

'I'm a doctor, to be sure; though rather an old one than a new one,' I replied. 'My name is Dr. Harvey.'

'Oh, then, I dare say you've come to see Mr. St. John's sister; she's upstairs.'

Concealing my astonishment at this information as well as I could, I answered that I certainly wished to see her; and wondering by what secret means Harry had managed to get Olive away from the Court and bring her here, I followed the woman up the narrow stairs to the first floor.

'She may be asleep, poor dear!' whispered she, as she softly opened the door and entered the room.

Excited with a new anxiety, I followed quickly, seeing at a glance, by the lowered blind and a phial and glass upon the toilet-

table, that there was sickness here, and, stepping past the woman, I approached the bed and drew aside the curtain. Looking down, I caught my breath in astonishment, for the shock I had received in hearing that St. John's sister was in the house was less even than that I felt in discovering that the face upon the pillow was not Olive's.

CHAPTER V.

JUNE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH.

'THERE's someone at the bell, sir,' whispered the woman apologetically.

I nodded, and, accompanying her to the door, said :

'I will wait here till my patient awakes ; then if I want anything I will call to you.'

Having closed the door silently, I crossed to the window and as carefully turned the Venetian blind to admit more light. In the bay recess was a table with some engraver's tools upon it, and a half-cut wood block, showing that Harry worked in this room. Then I returned to the bedside, and looked down again upon the still sleeping

girl. Additional light only served to convince me beyond all question that the girl was not Olive St. John. Her hair was tossed upon the pillow, throwing the delicate outline of her profile into high relief. Against the white pillow her tresses looked quite black, though I found later on that they were dark brown with a tinge of chestnut. Her features were long, her nose pronounced and undulating. Her parted lips showed teeth white, but wanting in regularity. Olive's face is round, her nose small and retroussée, her hair the colour of sable, and her eyes brown. I knew by the type of this girl's face that her eyes must be dark. And yet, though there was no single point of resemblance between them, the face I looked at seemed not unfamiliar. Was it possible, I asked myself, that Colonel St. John had left a daughter whose existence was kept secret from the world? Was that something in this girl which

seemed not unknown to me some faint resemblance to the friend I knew a dozen years ago? The sound of a door closing below awoke her. As her eyes slowly opened they fell upon me. Without moving, she looked at me in silent wonder for a moment. Then, her senses overcoming the first bewilderment of waking, she shrank away, her large, wide-opened eyes still fixed on my face, but with a look of dread in them. At the same time she raised her thin hand from the coverlet, and stretched it forth as if to repel me. Taking her hand gently, I said:

'I am Dr. Harvey. Have you ever heard that name?'

'Dr. Harvey?' she said, in a low, dubitative tone. Then as the door opened and Harry entered the room, a gleam of joy and confidence lit up her poor, thin face, and she added: 'Oh yes; this is the friend you have talked to me about.'

'Yes,' said Harry, grasping my hand. 'This is the friend who has made a man of me, and who will make a strong woman of you, please God!' he added with great tenderness, as he seated himself on the side of the bed and looked down at her.

'That I will, to be sure,' said I cheerily. 'Come, what's the matter with us?'

'Well, we've had a touch of brain-fever to begin with,' said Harry.

'That's all gone—not a sign of it, now,' said I, feeling her pulse; and then, taking her cool hand in mine, I perceived by the softness and pliancy of her fingers that at any rate she was not of the working class.

'Yes; it was taken in time, and stopped almost as soon as it declared itself,' said Harry; 'but the remedy, necessarily drastic, I suppose, has left an ill effect, which our medico seems unable to cope with. We can't get strong, can we, Mary?' Here

again his voice took an inflexion of tenderest sympathy.

Mary shook her head despondingly.

'And that makes us down-hearted, doesn't it?' he continued.

She nodded, her lips twitching, and a tear stealing from the corner of her eye.

'And I want to get well again,' she murmured, turning to me appealingly.

'Ay, ay, my dear; but we must have patience. Science goes hand-in-hand with Nature, and she does nothing in a hurry. Do you cough much?'

'Not at all.'

'Any pain here?'

'None. It is nothing but weakness. When I tried to walk across the room this morning I fell down.'

'A very sure intimation from Nature that you ought to have stopped in bed. How long has this been going on?'

'Sixteen days.'

'Ah, you expect to get about again after an attack of brain-fever at the end of a fortnight! You ought to know better than that, Harry. Show me what medicine you are taking.'

He fetched me half a dozen bottles—none empty, all different, as I found by tasting them.

'Your doctor is a young man?' I asked.

'Yes.'

'Just starting a practice. Very attentive. Anxious to please.'

'Yes.'

'I thought so. And to please you he has made half a dozen experiments with the hope of working a miracle. Stick to this bottle and throw all the rest away. Make up your mind to lie there for another eight days, don't bother that young doctor, and I answer for it that when I come to see you ten days hence you will tell me that I am not wanted—in a professional capacity.'

'Oh, I will try to be patient,' she exclaimed with impulsive eagerness, and then she added, her voice trembling with emotion as she turned her eyes to Harry and held out her hand to him, 'for your sake.'

He held her hand in his as he made some cheerful response, but what it was I did not notice, for I was wondering at the strange discrepancy between his manner now, which was touchingly sympathetic and affectionate, and the scornful tone of his remarks upon women when we had met before. And this I attributed to the influence of relationship, which opens a man's eyes to the merits of his kith and kin and makes him blind to their common weaknesses.

It was therefore with a fresh shock of surprise that I learnt from Harry, as we walked together towards the station, that Mary was not in any way related to him. We had been walking in silence for some

minutes after leaving the house, both having that on our minds which we found it difficult to approach, when I, to break the constraint, ventured some commonplace observation about 'Miss St. John's' condition. He corrected me at once.

'Her name is Mary Smith, Doctor,' said he.

'Mary Smith!' I echoed uneasily. 'I thought, being your sister——'

'She is not my sister. I had to tell that lie to get a decent lodging for the girl; but I want you to know the truth: we are not related in any way.'

Remembering the looks of affection exchanged between Harry and Mary Smith, I felt very uncomfortable; for, somehow, it lowered my esteem for the man I had hitherto regarded as upright and good.

'Have you known Miss Smith long?' I asked, not hitting on anything else to say.

'Not quite three weeks. She was ill then. She fell insensible upon the floor the

moment she entered my room—in the old quarters. Understand me, Doctor,' he said, stopping and speaking with impressive earnestness: 'if it was wrong that she should be there in my room, the shame is mine, not hers.'

'I'm glad to hear she is a good girl, Harry,' I said, but dolefully, for it hurt me still to think that he was not without blame.

'I left her at an hotel, and found these lodgings, where I took her the next morning. Come, come, Doctor, don't look like that. You make me doubt for the moment if I have done right.'

'I fear you have done wrong, Harry. For nothing can be right that has to be supported by a lie.'

'I plead necessity. You in my place would have done the same.'

'Possibly—but I am an old man.'

'What of that? I had to choose be-

tween abandoning her to the mercy of the parish, or taking her into these lodgings.'

'But had she no home?'

'None.'

'No friends?'

'Not one.'

'In that case, my boy, I hardly see how you could have taken any other course than this.'

'No, and thank God that course was open to me! Heaven knows what would have become of Mary if I had been compelled to abandon her. Think what you like of me, Doctor, but think well of her—she is a good girl.'

'I wish to think that you are good also, Harry.'

'Selfish as the rest,' he said; then, after a moment's silence, he said in a more vigorous tone: 'If ever I am a better man. it will be through Mary. Do you believe in reformation, Doctor?'

'Why, what do you mean?'

'In a man of my age throwing off the apathy and selfishness that has grown upon him with years of self-indulgence—changing completely by the mere association with a gentle woman? Surely there must be something analogous in chemistry to illustrate the case—some hard and stubborn substance that resists the action of every salt but one.'

'We have not so far as that to search, my boy,' said I, feeling in my pocket some grains of barley that I may have dropped in there for my pigeons. 'These grains might lie a hundred years in this state, and yet they are ready at any moment, under proper conditions, to burst into life, developing their latent energy, and yielding to the earth a thousand times more than they have taken from it. To those who never saw a grain of barley before, the thing would seem incredible—miraculous; just as the

growth of rich and tender feeling may appear impossible to those who have not studied the human heart.'

He took my arm, and pressed it with his in silence.

'But what has this to do with you, Hal?' I continued. 'Your heart is not dry and hard, and it never was.'

'Sluggish by disuse, though, Doctor; a bit callous by so much knocking about—something wrong with it there must have been, or I should not feel these twinges of remorse now that it has been quickened by sympathy with a sick girl. I haven't done the right thing by my mother and poor Olive; but——' He checked the impulse to reveal his intentions, and added: 'Better not venture to make promises until I know myself better. Good resolutions are so easy to make, so hard to keep.'

I wondered what it was he meditated doing; but I did not like to ask him.

'You haven't seen Olive since we met,' he said presently. 'I know that by your silence.'

'No; I have called at the Court two or three times; but she has kept—or been kept—out of my way.'

'There must be some design in that.'

'It looks like it, indeed. If you don't object, Hal, I should like to lay the case before my friend Fawcett. He's a shrewd man of the world, a lawyer, and a friend that we may trust.'

'Do anything, Doctor, that you think may be for their good. You're a better friend to Olive than I have been. I carry this about with me now as a talisman.' He drew from his pocket and showed me the purse Olive had sent by me. 'Do you know what I did with it when I went home that night?'

'No.'

'Put it away in a drawer, that the sight of it might not make me wretched.'

'It doesn't make you wretched now, Hal?'

'No; only hopeful,' said he.

It made me hopeful, too, to hear him talk like this. And, indeed, I should be altogether hopeful now if it were not for certain unpleasant speculations respecting the future which damp my spirits. Certain questions present themselves which I cannot answer satisfactorily. For example, what will he do with Mary Smith when she recovers health and strength? If she has neither home nor friends, he cannot abandon her; that will be less possible a fortnight hence than it was three weeks ago. If he maintains her, it must be under the false pretence that she is his sister. I don't like that. Then, again, if we succeed in getting Olive away from the Court, what is to become of her? I doubt if she could live with Harry and accept Mary as a sister. And if she could overcome the natural jealousy and prejudice of her sex, I am not certain

that it would be right for her to live with them. For though I know nothing against Mary Smith (and God forbid that I should do her an injustice, even in thought), it must surely be wrong to associate a simple and innocent young woman with another whose tendencies may be pernicious. I cannot forget the touch of Miss Smith's fingers. That was not the hand of a poor girl thrown out of work ; and yet she had neither home nor friends. And that phrase of Harry's when we were talking of marriage sticks in my mind : 'I would rather marry an absolutely wicked woman than one who could neither rise above nor sink below the dead-level of respectability. Well, well ! I have written to Robert Fawcett asking if he will be at home on Friday. If he says yes, I will certainly go over to Maidstone and sound him.

CHAPTER VI.

JUNE SEVENTEENTH TO TWENTY-THIRD.

This morning I was just sitting down to lunch, when Morton opened the door and introduced Mr. Fawcett. My old friend came in at his heels, looking just the same as ever, gaunt and ungainly, his short-clipped iron-gray hair on end, his spectacles low down on his long red nose, his lips drawn down at the corners of his mutton-chop whiskers in an habitual sneer, and his shrewd little eyes twinkling under his bushy eyebrows that are ever bristling out with irritability. And his manner is not a bit improved, for before taking any notice of me he threw his head back to look through

his glasses at my man Morton, and said brusquely :

'Well, what are you waiting for ? There's nothing for you to overhear.'

'I only wanted to inquire, sir, if I were to lie a cover for you.'

'Of course you are. Don't suppose I should hang my hat on the peg if I didn't intend to stay to lunch. Well,' he continued, turning to me and taking my hand as Morton meekly backed out of the room, 'what's the matter with you ?'

'Nothing in the world,' said I. 'It's very good of you to run over, and so soon. Why, you could not have received my letter before this morning.'

'Don't look as if you had been doing anything more than usually foolish,' he continued, with his old, but not altogether pleasant, manner of continuing his own train of thought, regardless of what has been said to him.

'No,' I replied. 'Why should you think I have?'

'Your patients and my clients are pretty much alike, I suppose. Don't want us until they get into a mess and need someone to drag them out of it.'

'You make a distinction between clients and friends, Bob?'

He is one of the few friends who addresses me by my Christian name, and I expect I am the only man who dares to address him by a diminutive. His wife calls him Robert.

'Most remarkable thing,' said he, seating himself at the table; 'never drop in here at any time without finding an uncut joint on the table and clean table-linen. Never find a spot on the tablecloth, nor the fag-end of yesterday's pie, nor the knuckle-end of Sunday's leg of mutton. How's that?'

'I don't like 'em,' said I.

'Comes of being an old bachelor, I suppose.'

'Well, if I had a wife, Bob, I should think her tastes would be the same as mine in that regard.'

'Give the odds and ends away to the undeserving poor, for the encouragement of thriftlessness, lying, and hypocrisy. Seen you before, haven't I?' he asked, turning his eyes fiercely on Morton, who was laying his cover.

'Yes, sir. Me and Hann have been in Dr. Harvey's service seving years.'

'Ah, yes. Remember. Married the cook. Good cook, too. Sirloin done to a turn. Shrewd, smart man that,' he added, as Morton withdrew. 'Worth something to have a couple of good servants like those.'

'It's a blessing, Bob, that I never can be too grateful for.'

'Result of not having a wife.'

'I venture to think that no wife could fail to appreciate good servants.'

'No, but the servants would fail to appreciate her. Comes to the same thing. Mrs. Fawcett can't keep a decent servant three weeks. Why?—what's the secret?'

'Pay them decent wages; treat them with due consideration——'

'And let them rob you through thick and thin. Yes, that's the secret.'

I couldn't help laughing at this. For every Monday morning Morton brings me his book with the tradesmen's bills accounting for every farthing of expenditure, and so I told Fawcett.

'Fair division of labour,' said he; 'Ann cooks the joints—her husband cooks the accounts. I envy you. Excellent servants.'

'They are.'

'With a fool of a master.'

'Eh?'

'But you don't know it, so you couldn't

be better suited. That's enough about servants.'

We turned to other subjects, greatly to my relief, for if, as Fawcett suggested, Morton should be listening at the keyhole, it would have hurt the poor fellow very much. Not that I suppose for a moment he would be guilty of eavesdropping, but Fawcett has a way of speaking as if one were deaf, and his remarks might very well have been heard in the hall. And there are things in the past with regard to Morton and his wife, before they came to me—things that I don't care to refer to even here—which make them particularly sensitive on subjects of this kind.

After discussing general topics for some time, I took advantage of a pause in the conversation to say: 'Oh, by-the-by, do you remember Colonel St. John?'

'Ah, now we're coming to it,' he replied, pushing aside his plate. 'Got a cigar?'

I put the boxes before him, and while I was pointing out the merits of my favourite brand he pursued :

'Yes, I remember him. Met him two or three times here. Never could make out what was the matter with him.'

'*I* never knew that there was anything the matter with him.'

'Proves that there was something abnormal in his condition. Don't wish me to believe that he was perfect, do you ? He'd be alive now—go on living to the end of time—if there hadn't been something wrong somewhere. No one is perfect. I'm not. You're not, and you know it. Bristling all over with imperfections. Never could find out what St. John's particular vice or folly was. Good cigar.'

'I see what you mean now. Well, he did one foolish thing, I believe.'

'Cost you eighteen pence apiece, I dare say.'

'He left the whole of his property to his wife, unconditionally.'

'I should lock 'em up in the safe with my cash-box if they were mine.'

'Lock up my cigars!' I exclaimed. 'They would lose half their flavour for me if I had to do that.'

'Well, that's the most absurd piece of madness I ever heard of. The man who could leave all his money to his wife ought never to be trusted alone. Explains the very thing that puzzled me—St. John was an idiot!'

'He had unbounded faith in his wife.'

'A born fool.'

'She was a loving wife and most affectionate mother in his lifetime.'

'Without a spark of intelligence,' he added, referring still, I believe, to Colonel St. John. 'The wisest legislators in the land have settled precisely what share of the estate should go the wife, and still you find

a dolt like this, who runs counter to the dictates of reason, and leaves his estate to his wife—a wife who has children. What must follow? The wife marries again, and the second husband turns the first brood out of the nest.'

'How did you learn this?'

'And I don't blame him. I'd do it myself.'

'Nonsense, Bob!'

'Without a penny. How did I learn it? From my own common-sense. Any lawyer would have foreseen the event, and dissuaded the man from making such a will, unless he held a brief on the other side.' He rose, fetched a quire of notepaper and a pencil from the side table, and, reseating himself, crossed his legs, set the paper on his knee, and said: 'We must understand what we have to discuss. Answer me briefly. Now, then, when did Colonel St. John die?'

'Ten years ago.'

'How old was his widow?'

'Forty-six.'

'No chicken! How many children?'

'Two: Olive then fourteen, Harry twenty.'

'When did she marry again?

'Before the end of that year.'

He wrote this down with a contemptuous sniff.

'And who was the second husband?'

'The Rev. William Lawson, Incumbent of St. Andrew's.'

He received this with a jerk of the head and another significant sniff.

'How old was he?'

'Not above thirty then.'

He glanced at me over the rims of his glasses, and raised his eyebrows, but made no other comment.

'What became of the children?'

'Harry left home the day his stepfather came into the house. Olive remained.'

'What became of Harry?'

'He went to London to seek his fortune.'

'Didn't set the Thames on fire?'

'He had a hard struggle.'

'But with a five-pound note drawn occasionally from a simple old Doctor——'

'Not a penny piece would he take from me. He was a proud, high-spirited lad, and would accept help from no one. He never let me know what he suffered, and I saw nothing of him until he came one morning and showed me a handful of money.'

'Ah, I wonder how he got that handful of money?' said Fawcett, in a deliberating tone of voice, as he scratched his grizzled whisker with the pencil.

'He got it,' I replied warmly, 'by honest hard work, as a journeyman wood-carver.'

'When was that?'

'Five years ago. And I'll tell you why

he came to me with that money ; it was to show me that he could give his sister a home in London, and to obtain my help in persuading her to leave Higham Court.'

'Five years ago—fourteen and five are nineteen—he couldn't take her away without the consent of her mother ; but she agreed to it under the persuasive influence of Mr. Lawson, I dare say ?'

'He did not ask for their assent ; he simply appealed to Olive, but she refused.'

'For practical common-sense one young woman is worth half a dozen men.'

'Oh, you paint everyone your own colour, so they must needs look abominable.'

'Preferred her mother and Higham Court, with the prospect of a nice little settlement when mamma dies, to the effervescent Harry and a model lodging-house, with a workhouse in the perspective ! So should I.'

'We did attribute her refusal to filial love and sympathy with her mother then——'

'Why don't you now?' asked Fawcett, as sharp as a needle.

'Because there are certain indications in her manner—and those indications are unhappily becoming more and more pronounced—of a feeling stronger even than that of filial affection, though that must still be counted as a factor.'

'Don't understand you. Come to the point.'

'Well, Bob, in a word, I believe her stepfather is exercising a kind of fascination over her.'

'Fascination? Is he a good-looking sort of man?'

'One of the most unpleasant-looking men I ever saw.'

'And he's forty. What do you mean by fascination?'

'The paralyzing influence a snake is said

to exercise over his victim before he strikes.'

Fawcett, who had been looking at me over the rims of his glasses, now threw his head back and surveyed me through the lenses, bending his shaggy brows in perplexity.

'That influence,' I continued, 'he may have brought to bear upon Mrs. St. John ten years ago ; it would help to explain her marrying the man so soon after the death of her first husband, who, compared with him, was "Hyperion to a Satyr."'

'You explained that just now by her physical and mental condition at the time.'

'That condition would make her more susceptible to the influence, I suspect.'

'Now you touch a matter that you ought to know more about than I do.'

'Well, you see, Bob,' said I, flattered by this small concession to my sagacity, 'Mrs.

St. John knew that in taking a second husband she must lose her son.'

'Though I don't suppose you do,' said Fawcett, continuing his own train of thought. 'For a more successful hunter of mares'-nests never lived.'

'Oh, if that is your opinion——' I closed my lips firmly.

'And what if she did know that?' he pursued, taking no notice of my displeasure. 'I warrant the prospect of losing Master Harry was not very distressing. Young men of twenty are generally priggish, conceited, overbearing, and insolent, and I have very little doubt that he made himself particularly objectionable to the man whom, for some reason or other, she admired. Well, now, I suppose Mr. St. John, having come to his senses, wants to know if he can claim any part of the estate which his father presumably left to his wife as a reliable trustee for the children.'

'No; I am certain that the pecuniary question has not entered into his consideration at all. His chief concern is for the welfare of his sister. If by any legal process she could be removed from the subtle influence which I feel sure Mr. Lawson is exercising over her——'

'She is twenty-four. She is free to do as she pleases. And unless you can show some better cause, the law won't interfere in the matter. As for your subtle influence, Kit, I regard that as purely imaginary—not because it is in itself an impossibility, but because it is improbable that Lawson, if he be the kind of man you represent, would exercise his power to restrain the girl from leaving Higham Court. There is nothing whatever remarkable in the case, except that, and that is remarkable. Inexplicable from any point of view that I can look at it. A worldly man would be only too glad to let the girl go and join her brother as a means

of getting the mother and her property completely under his control. Unless——' he added after a pause, and then, tilting his head on one side, he rattled the pencil between his teeth, and looked steadfastly at me with his little eyes screwed up to their smallest dimensions.

'Unless what?' I asked presently.

'I'll tell you, Kit, when I've seen this Mr. Lawson, and I will find means to see him as soon as you can give me convincing proof that he is exercising undue influence.'

'Supposing her brother offers her a home, and begs her to come to him. If she declines on the grounds that she dare not——'

'That will do,' said he, rising; and taking another cigar, he added, 'We've had enough of St. Johns and Lawson; show me your roses.'

He stayed another hour with me, but not another word could I draw out of him respecting the mysterious alternative he had

hinted at. Morton handed him his hat and stick, and opened the door for him when he was about to go.

'There's a shilling for you, Morton,' said he, putting a piece of money in his hand.

But before he had gone a couple of yards beyond the garden-gate Morton ran after him, and said:

'If you please, sir, you gave me a sovereign by error.'

'Oh, have I?' said Fawcett, throwing up his head to look him well in the face, and in a tone which left me no doubt that he had given the gold with the set purpose of testing the poor fellow's honesty.

I was so vexed that I wished Morton had pocketed the piece and said nothing about it. However, thought I, now that he finds he has done him an injustice, he will certainly give him something for his honesty. Not he. He took back the sovereign and gave him a shilling, and with nothing but a nod for

thanks went on his way. Poor Morton came back looking a little crestfallen, as well he might. However, I have found means of making it up to the good fellow without wounding his feelings.

I could not sleep last night for thinking of my friend Harry, and the difficulties that must arise if Olive accepts the offer to share his home, which I feel sure he will again make. And the more I think of it, the more obvious it becomes that for this and other reasons Mary Smith must not continue to live under his roof. Happily, by dint of seeking, I have found an expedient for separating them before any mischief arises, and without casting her altogether upon her own resources. And this notion so pleases me that I have resolved to go to Brixton to-morrow—albeit it is only four days since I was there. But I never yet have known a good thing to be done too soon.

* * * * *

I arrived at Arlingford Terrace about three o'clock this afternoon. The good woman who opened the door, remembering me, told me with a smile that Mr. St. John and his sister were both at home ; and with that, instead of leading me upstairs as before, she ushered me into a back room on the ground-floor, when, to my surprise, I found Mary Smith sitting in an easy-chair near the window, where Harry, with a glass in his eye, was bending over a wood block.

'Come, this is a pleasant surprise,' said I, 'albeit I did order you to stay upstairs for ten days.'

'Ah, she's a wilful young woman,' said Harry, rising.

'But not an ungrateful one,' she added, giving me her hand.

It was cool and fresh, and there was a bright, healthful lustre in her fine dark eyes. Indeed, but for her pallor and the thinness of her face, one would not have known she

had been seriously ill; she stood erect, and there was no lassitude in the expression of her face or the tone of her voice.

'There's little to be grateful for, my dear, in being kept prisoner against your will. If you were only a little bit stouter,' I said, holding her at arm's length in admiration.

I like young women to be stout, but I must admit that the slightness of Mary's figure, and even the thinness of her cheek, harmonized with the cast of her features, the smallness of her head, and the graceful litheness of her body. It pleased me to look in her face. I doubt if it could be called handsome, though certainly her eyes are lovely; but she has a good brow and a good chin, showing intelligence and earnestness, and the severer qualities are softened by a very sweet expression, and a look of purity which at that moment comforted me greatly. She met my scrutiny without flinching, and with a smile in her soft eyes.

'You need no more physic, my dear,' said I, seating her in the chair she had risen from. 'All you want is pure air. And now, Harry, let me look at you, and see what you are doing.'

'Oh, hang the thing!' said he, sitting down before his work. 'I have to do the illustrations for a penny dreadful, and this week the subject is a railway collision at night. Well, it requires a stretch of imagination to conceive what can be seen in the dark.'

He handed me the sepia sketch he had made to work from.

'Why, that's the very thing!' I exclaimed. 'That light from the fire-box——'

'Ha! what do you know of such matters?' he asked with a laugh.

'Well, I ought to know something, for I was in that Wayford wreck. And a curious experience I had then,' said I, turning towards Mary Smith.

But at the sight of her I caught my

breath and said no more. She was sitting back in the shadow. But in the half-light I saw on her white face an expression of dread resignation to inevitable Fate, which, reviving a past impression, established her identity. I knew now where I had seen that face before. It was at that last moment of peril in the doomed train ; and Mary Smith was the woman of the iron bracelets.

CHAPTER VII.

JUNE TWENTY-THIRD.

HAPPILY, St. John was bending closely over his work, so that, if my face betrayed the agitation I felt in identifying Mary Smith as the escaped felon, the symptoms were seen only by her.

'Well, Doctor, what was this "curious experience"?' asked St. John, after waiting a moment for me to continue.

Recovering my self-possession, but still fixing my eyes on Mary Smith, I answered:

'An experience so terrible that I have not trusted a word of it to any living soul.'

'Oh, come, that won't do!' said he, in a light tone that showed he suspected nothing.

'You have told either too much or too little to retreat. We must have the story—eh, Mary?'

'If Dr. Harvey wishes to tell it,' she answered, speaking low yet distinctly.

'I don't wish to tell it,' said I; 'and, what is more, I never will tell it, either to Harry or anyone else.'

She rose swiftly to her feet with inexpressible gratitude in her face, and with a side glance at St. John, still plying his graver steadily, she stepped silently to my side, took my fingers in her trembling hands, and, before I was aware of her intention, raised and pressed them to her lips.

'Professional etiquette, or some such nonsense,' growled St. John.

Professional etiquette! Had he looked round he would have seen a curious specimen of the nonsense in question, for, carried away by the impulse of the moment, by sympathy, by joy in finding again the poor

wanderer whose image fading away into the dark has haunted me continually since the night I thoughtlessly abandoned her to her own resources, I was at that instant kissing the bowed head of Mary Smith.

'Stick to your penny dreadfuls if you like 'em,' said I, putting his sketch before him. 'I did not come to harrow the feelings of my patient. Come, my dear, let us see if there isn't something more to your taste in here,' and with that I took off the lid of the basket I had brought, displaying as handsome a collection of roses as any professional gardener could take to a show.

She was too much upset by emotion to take immediate interest in the flowers, but I managed to mask her silence and the perturbation of her ideas by my loquacity, and this without much artifice, for if there is one subject upon which I feel enthusiastic it is my roses. And Hal, laying aside his

graver and joining us, fell to admiring the blooms and talking about the old garden and incidents in the past which he said were recalled to his memory by the scent of the roses. Then, seeing us so cheerful and chatty, Mary's thoughts gradually turned into a new course, and a natural smile lit up her careworn face. So one by one we took out the fine blooms and laid them on the table ; then St. John, peeping into the basket, said :

'This is all very well, Doctor, but are we only to see and smell? Have you nothing down there to gratify another sense? Take out that cabbage-leaf, Mary.'

She looked at me for permission, and I nodding, she lifted the leaf, and discovered the strawberries which I picked myself this morning as soon as the sun had dried off the dew.

'Ha, ha!' cried St. John, rubbing his hands with his old boyish glee ; 'I know

the look of 'em all. I could swear that fat, shining, rosy chap came from the bed by the peach wall.'

'Yes, they're my Goliaths,' said I, laughing. 'You rascal! I find 'em more plentiful now than when you used to drop in of a morning, and I'm sorry for it, in one sense, for the main delight in growing them is to see young people enjoying 'em. Do you try these, my dear, ere Hal leaves none worth eating.'

We all dipped into the fruit, laughing and chatting in this simple fashion, and Mary laughed too; but there was a hysterical ring in her merriment, which did not please my critical ear, and I was not surprised when presently her hand slipped from the basket, and she bowed her head low to conceal her face from us. The reaction had come; she was crying. St. John looked down on her and then over her shoulder at me in trouble; and I winked at him with a frown

to bid him take no notice, myself beginning a long-winded story about the urchins who got over the garden-wall and couldn't scramble up it again ; but this was all to no purpose, for the tears would flow, and after vainly attempting to check them, poor Mary was constrained to rise quickly and go out of the room. Hal followed her, and I was left alone to my reflections.

'Well, well,' thought I, 'these are good symptoms, all the same. No hardened culprit would be touched by a little kindness in that way. There is good in her, and under proper treatment all that is bad may be eradicated. Unhappy propensities she may have, but she is too young for confirmed habits. One can see by her face that there is nothing radically wrong in her disposition. After all, she may be guilty only of a momentary yielding to temptation, and I warrant she is more sinned against than sinning. But, for all that, she must

not stay here. That is more evident now than ever. It is plain that a strong attachment already exists between her and Hal, and it would not be difficult to foresee the result of the attachment if they are left to themselves. No doubt they honestly regard each other as brother and sister now, but it is not in the nature of things that they should continue reasonable for long. And, much as I sympathize with Mary Smith, I cannot stand passively by and suffer St. John to make her his wife—knowing what I know about her past.'

My meditations had gone about so far when Hal returned to the room alone.

'I have persuaded her to lie down for half an hour,' said he.

'I am glad of that,' I replied; 'the poor girl has overtaxed her strength. It will do her good to rest awhile, and give us opportunity for a gossip. Do you fetch me a jug of water; then you can go on with your

work while I see to my roses, and we may chat at the same time.'

He fetched the water, and then, after a few words about the flowers, he seated himself at the window and took up his graver.

'I have seen Fawcett,' said I, opening the conversation, 'and told him how matters stand at Higham Court.'

'Oh! and what does he say?'

'Well, he takes a most unaccountably commonplace view of the case, and seems to see nothing of an extraordinary nature in the behaviour of Mr. Lawson.'

'I am disposed to think he's right,' replied St. John, after a pause. 'We are apt to exaggerate the faults of people we dislike——'

'And the virtues of those we love,' I added, surprised and not very well pleased by this alteration in my young friend's views.

'We watch their actions through the

distorting medium of sentiment, so that passive defects may appear to be positive vices. Fawcett's view is more likely to be the correct one.'

'Why, how's this? You seem to have grown mighty reasonable in a few days.'

'Have I?' said he with a laugh. 'Well, I can't explain how the change has come about.'

'But I can,' said I to myself, thinking I saw which way the cat was about to jump. 'You are catching at an excuse for shirking your responsibilities, my boy, and leaving poor little Olive to fare as she may. But that won't do for me.'

'Tell me all that Fawcett said, Doctor,' pursued St. John.

I told him conscientiously all that I remembered of my conversation with Fawcett, pretty much as I have written it.

'Yes, that must be it,' said he, when I had come to an end. 'It is more likely

that Lawson is an ordinary man than an extraordinary villain. Mean, crafty, contemptible wretches one meets every day, but a thorough double-faced, stick-at-nothing villain not once in a lifetime.'

'Yet they are not scarce—villains of the most extraordinary capabilities—to judge by the papers.'

'Do you think so? They seem to me extremely few—I mean villains drawn from our class of society—considering the enormous number of individuals we make.'

'Ah,' said I, with a grunt of dissatisfaction, 'in that case you won't think it advisable now to take Olive away from the Court?'

'That's not to be thought of,' said he emphatically.

I was about to make some very sharp retort, when he continued:

'In the first place, as Fawcett pointed out, Olive may not choose to leave the

Court, and we wrong her to suppose that she would forsake her mother. In the second place, we have to consider what that poor woman's condition would be if Olive were taken away. If Olive is unhappy, it is safe to conclude that Mrs. Lawson is unhappy also. The power to make women wretched, and a delight in inflicting pain upon them, seems to be characteristic of mean and cowardly men ; and though we may take it that Lawson is not an absolute villain, I feel perfectly certain that he is mean and cowardly. Well, fancy the lot of any woman abandoned to the mercy of such a man without a soul to turn to for sympathy and love.'

'This is very true, my dear boy,' said I, congratulating myself that the harsh words on my tongue had not been spoken ; 'but what is to be done ?'

'I know perfectly well what I ought to do,' he replied quietly.

'And what's that, Hal?'

'Apologize to Lawson,' he said, in the same even voice.

I could say nothing for astonishment, and he continued :

'That dawned upon me the day I came to you to borrow money to pay my turf debt. And the light has been growing stronger ever since. The change began then, Doctor.'

He laid aside the graver, and, turning on his stool, faced me, nursing his knee, and looking at me with great tenderness in his deep eyes.

'I think it was the cawing of the rooks that first struck the chord of remorse. The look out of the old workshop made me think how selfish and callous I had grown since the days when I used to stand there dreaming of a chivalrous future, and building up golden castles in the blue mist of the weald.'

'My dear Hal,' said I, taking a seat by his side and laying a hand on his, 'I am happy to hear you talk in this way. You used to hint something of these dreams to me; could you let me know what chivalrous idea is now in your mind?'

'A project as unromantic and practical as the age we live in; simply to eat humble-pie with a view to drawing nearer to my mother and Olive. Lawson has expressed the utmost goodwill towards me, conceiving that I should never bend my pride to accept anything from him. He shall find out that he mistook me. Knowing my repugnance, he begged me, when we last met, to take that place at Higham Court to which I am entitled as Mrs. Lawson's son. Next time he makes that offer, I will accept.'

'But, my dear boy, this means the subversion of all your habits, the sacrifice in some measure of your freedom and inde-

pendence. Have you thought of these things?'

'Yes,' he replied with a smile. 'If it weren't for the sacrifice, the thing would be as easy to do as to think about doing. I don't want to attempt too much, for fear of breaking down, and naturally I shall try to reduce the sacrifice to its smallest proportions. You see, I am not bound to stick perpetually at the Court. If I only go down there for three days at a time—a week now and then—it may do some good. It will cheer Olive, at least; and if there is any unholy influence at work there, I may be able to counteract it a bit.'

'Capital!' I exclaimed. 'This is really a most common-sense, practical way of overcoming the difficulty. I wonder it never entered my mind.'

But just then a question occurred to me which made me silent.

'One difficulty has to be overcome before

I can attempt anything in that direction,' he said, after a few moments' silence, and as though he had divined the question that troubled me. 'I must do something for Mary.'

'Ah, to be sure. We have lost sight of her,' said I, as if this was a surprise to me.

'It isn't easy,' he continued. 'I am sure she would not be content to be dependent upon my help. That is evident by her anxiety to get speedily well and strong. She is very reticent, but I found her yesterday poring over the advertisement columns of the papers.'

'She is a good girl, I feel sure, Hal. A right-thinking and right-feeling young woman. It would surely lessen our esteem for her if she were willing to live in idleness upon the—eh—upon——'

'Charity,' said St. John, supplying the word I hesitated to utter. 'Poor soul! she has pride, too, thank God! If you had seen

her, Doctor, the day I found her, you would have said that her spirit was completely broken, and could never revive again. She was sitting on the embankment in an old waterproof-cloak that had probably been given her in pity. Yet even in that waterproof she looked a lady; there was such grace in her bent figure. Her face, though, it was that struck me. It reminded one of Vigny's "La Cigale." But with the beauty, the pathos, and purity of that ideal there was an expression of terrible resignation so deeply tragic that, thinking only of myself, it struck me that here was a study for the young Melpomene I have had it in my mind to do! I sat down beside her, and made some observation with a view to opening a conversation. She turned, looking me straight in the face with a gaze that literally awed me, but she answered not a word. Presently, laughing at myself for my temerity, I told her brutally that I would

give her a sovereign if she would come to my rooms and let me sketch her face. Still silent, she rose and nodded assent to my proposal. She would not walk by my side, but stopped while, mystified by her strange behaviour, I went on a couple of yards, thinking she had thought better of my proposal, and did not intend to accept my offer. But, turning round, I found that she was following me with the spiritless docility of a beaten dog, a cowed brute with the face of a saint. In that strange way we walked on, she following me like an automaton along the streets, into the house, and up the stairs; she was behind me when I opened the door, and when I bade her go in she entered. But, by Heaven, I believe that had I pointed to the well of the staircase and bade her throw herself down there, she would have obeyed me with the same passive resignation!'

'Good God!'

'It was in attempting to remove her hat at my bidding that she fell down like a clod upon the floor. I believe she was dying from starvation.'

'Did she tell you how she came in that condition?'

'She has never told me one word about her past. I know absolutely nothing concerning her, except that she has neither friend nor home, and that her name is Mary Smith.'

'My dear boy,' said I, as impressively as I could, 'if, after all your kindness, and with her evident grateful regard towards you, she has told you nothing about her past history, 'tis a sure proof that she has good reason for wishing you to know nothing about it. Therefore, we shall be only doing what is right and proper not to make any inquiry whatever into what concerns her only.'

St. John nodded, smiling at what he thought was a very simple and obvious

conclusion on my part. Then he said gravely, after looking out of the window absently for a minute:

'To come back to our point of departure—it is a difficult thing to find an occupation for her. She has intelligence, and a certain amount of accomplishments—quite enough to fit her for the situation of a governess. But who would take her without reference? Why, the commonest chandler's wife wouldn't have her for a drudge without what is called a character.'

'My boy,' said I, 'that's a difficulty I can help you out of in a twinkling. But, hush! I hear her foot in the passage.'

The foot I heard was not Mary Smith's—as I might have known by the heavy fall of it, had I considered a moment—but the woman of the house with the tea-things on a tray. However, before she had ceased to rattle the cups and saucers, Mary came into

the room as quietly as a mouse, and stood before us abashed, as if with shame in having succumbed to her weakness.

'The sound of the crockery has brought you down, I warrant,' said I. 'You knew you would be wanted, and you're quite right, my dear; for I can't abide to see a man pour out tea.'

'Well, you've poured it out for yourself years enough, Doctor,' said St. John.

'Ay; but I like it none the better for that,' said I, and then, the woman leaving the room, I set a chair for Mary, and, laying my hand on her shoulder as she seated herself, added, 'The rest has done you good, my child?'

'Yes,' said she, looking up in my face; 'but I still feel ashamed of myself. It was so foolish to give way like that just because I felt a little too happy.'

'It wasn't happiness, but want of strength. If you were a little bit stronger,

all the happiness in the world could yield you nothing but smiles. You need country air and country diet to give you strength—none of that for me, my dear,' said I, holding her hand as she was about to pour milk in my teacup. 'I love chalk well enough in the Kentish hills, but not in my tea. Are you fond of the country, Mary ?'

'Oh, I think Brixton is beautiful,' said she, looking out into the patch of ground at the back of the house, with its miserable stunted vegetation.

'Why, surely there is nothing there to remind you of the country. Look at those poor wretched things in the shape of bushes —so begrimed with soot and abominations that you can scarcely see the natural colour of their foliage. They fill me with pity, and I can but wonder how they exist. And see the colour of the atmosphere. You can look the sun in the face without blinking, and it seems no brighter than a

copper plate for the murky cloud that comes betwixt us. Why, all the oxygen in the air is burned up by the kitchen fires, and here are millions of men and women about us all sickly and wan for the want of it. And there's bread!—you can smell the alum in it; and as for your butter, I believe there's not a particle of cream in it.'

'Well, this is a queer return for our hospitality, isn't it, Mary?' said St. John, laughing.

'I find no fault with your hospitality, Hal,' I retorted, 'but 'tis the only thing I find to admire in Brixton. Brixton! Why, my dear, has he never told you of Wrotham Hill, where the fresh breeze comes from the sea over miles and miles of woodland and pasture, furzy common and pungent hop-gardens?'

'Yes, yes,' she replied, but without enthusiasm.

'And has it not inspired you with a

desire to see more of Nature than you can find in that miserable strip of ground that 'tis satire to call a garden?'

'Si on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, il faut aimer ce qu'on a,' she replied, with a grave little smile.

'Ha, ha! You would fog me with French, would you? But I understand you, for all that—If you haven't what you like, you must like what you have: that's about your meaning, I suppose. But to come to the point, for you may be sure I have not made this journey to Brixton without a motive—will you give me the pleasure of seeing you at Wrotham as soon as you are strong enough to make the journey?'

The girl looked across the table to St. John in silence, as if for counsel. He nodded acquiescence, and said: 'It will do you no end of good, Mary.'

'Ay, more than all the drugs in London,'

I added. 'And if you wish to regain strength and vigour quickly——'

'I do want to be strong,' she said earnestly. 'For I have to earn my living, Doctor.'

'Indeed,' said I, pretending to be vastly surprised. 'Why, this happens most fortunately. For by the time you are in a fit state for work you will know whether you like Wrotham or not; and if you do like it, it may suit you to accept the engagement which I shall be only too happy to offer you. For, you must know, I'm at my wits' end to find a nice little lady who would undertake to be my housekeeper.'

'But I'm afraid I don't know anything about housekeeping,' said she gravely.

'Well, then, my dear, the sooner you begin to learn, the better. There, we'll say no more upon the subject just now. But when I am gone you can discuss it with Hal, and raise all the objections you can

find, and if you surmount 'em all—as I sincerely hope you may—I shall expect to see you next Monday, by which time I doubt not you will be able to manage the journey. You shall drop me a line on Saturday, Hal, to say what train you will take, and I will be at the station with the trap to meet you.'

With this I rose and bade them good-bye. And I gave Mary a kiss, partly because a sweet expression of gratitude in her soft eyes drew my heart towards her, and partly because I wished her to understand that she had nothing to dread in the future from the harshness of her employer.

And now I have to tell Morton and his wife of this new arrangement ; but I doubt if it will be quite agreeable to them, for these admirable servants work like slaves, and really do the duties of half a dozen, in their anxiety to prove their gratitude, by sparing me the expense of housemaids,

gardener, etc. I should be very sorry if they thought I was dissatisfied with them. However, they must be told, and the sooner the better. Still, I think, as it is now late, that I may postpone the explanation till to-morrow morning.

Mem.—To send St. John a cheque to meet Mary's present requirements. I observed that she was very well and prettily dressed, but she will need a perfect outfit of gowns and bonnets in coming here. —Also to speak firmly but not harshly to Morton.

CHAPTER VIII.

JUNE TWENTY-FOURTH AND TWENTY-FIFTH.

I TOLD Morton, when he was clearing the breakfast-table, that I expect a young lady to come next week, and that in all probability she will take the place of housekeeper here. He said, 'Certingly, sir,' in his usual respectful manner, but I saw by his constrained manner that he was upset by the unlooked-for intimation. And I was not greatly surprised when, half an hour later, he came into my study where I was reading the paper, his wife accompanying him. At the first glance I perceived by the set of Ann's lips and her husband's submissive attitude that she had undertaken to

speak, and she did. She asked me if I had any reason to complain of the service, and when I replied in the negative, she said, 'Because me and James, sir, can't understand why we are to have an housekeeper put over us.'

'This is a matter that concerns my own convenience and inclinations,' said I firmly.

'Because we'd rather leave, sir, if we ain't giving satisfaction.'

'If you wish to leave me——' I began; but at this the poor woman, putting her apron to her eyes, began to whimper, and James, taking a handkerchief, turned aside to blow his nose.

'After serving you for so many years,' she sobbed.

'And doing of our best at all times,' added James.

'To be turned away like this for no fault of our own,' she continued, sobbing.

'I don't wish you to go,' said I. 'Come,

come, be reasonable. This young lady is bright and amiable. She will not interfere with your arrangements in the least, but, on the contrary, will lighten your duties and anxieties in many ways. Though, to be sure,' I added, looking at the case from another point of view, 'another in the family means additional work, and so we must engage a maid to help you, Ann.'

'Oh, I couldn't abide to see another servant in the place, for there is not a bit more than I can do,' said she.

'Well, then, it's only just that you should have the wages I might pay to someone else. So I shall raise your salary ten pounds a year, my good woman.'

'Oh, I'm sure you pay us quite enough, sir,' they both declared in a breath. And then, protesting that they wished nothing but to give satisfaction to me, they said they should be most happy to take their orders from Miss Smith, and would show

her the same obedience and respect they had shown to me, and so the incident closed to our mutual satisfaction.

In the afternoon I received a letter from Mary Smith, written in a very pretty hand and gracefully worded, saying that neither St. John nor she had been able to raise a single objection to my proposal, and that her only fear was that I should be disappointed in her, and find her less worthy of my kindness than she herself wished to be. In conclusion she said that her desire to accept my invitation had led them already to study the time-table, and decide upon taking the 10.30 train on Monday. To-morrow we must set about preparing rooms for my visitors, for of course St. John will stay here some days before taking any decisive steps towards obtaining a footing at Higham Court.

* * * * *

The most unexpected thing has happened.

This morning, as I was returning from my round, I caught sight of Mr. Lawson coming towards me. On seeing me he raised his hat, and it was evident he desired to speak. I pulled up by the foot-path.

'How do you do, Doctor?' said he, in his usual bland and somewhat patronizing tone. 'How do you do?'

'Very well, thank you, Mr. Lawson,' I replied. 'All well at home?'

'Hum!' with a little shrug, a dubious shake of the head and a lifting of the eye-brows, 'I do not feel quite easy about Mrs. Lawson, and I fear that Dr. Heath doesn't quite understand her. Might I ask you to call in one morning and see her?'

'That I will, with the greatest pleasure. But will my visit be equally agreeable to Mrs. Lawson?'

'I assure you that nothing but timidity —a fear that you could not forgive her the

unreasoning prejudice she took against you years ago—has restrained her from meeting you, when you have been good enough to call upon me at the Court. That timidity I have overcome, and, indeed, she expressed a desire only this morning that when we next met I should ask you to call.'

'In that case I will certainly drop in as I pass.'

'How kind of you!' said he, beaming up at me with that eternal smile creasing his sallow cheeks. I looked down into his face as I again took his offered hand, trying to read if he was telling the truth, but I could never make anything out of his shallow colourless eyes. 'He may be truthful; it is quite possible I have wronged this man by my suspicions,' I said to myself, and yet I could not overcome my dislike to him. I fear I am too apt to judge by appearances and to mistrust the things I cannot understand. And I feel

that till the end of time I can never like Mr. Lawson's face, or be sure that its expression is an honest index to his character. But that is not surprising, for I believe that a professed physiognomist would be puzzled by the queer compound of intellectual and animal characteristics to be found there. I have been looking at the plates in Lavater's book on physiognomy, and I find in half a dozen different types a certain resemblance to Mr. Lawson. Some of the characteristics are good, others bad : 'Intelligence,' 'Foresight,' 'Calculation,' 'Purpose'; there is a touch of all these in the upper part of his face ; and then come 'Avarice' and 'Rapacity,' marked by the thin receding wings of the nostril and the vulture-like outline of the nose ; 'Brutality' in the underhung jaw (partly concealed in Mr. Lawson's case by the closely-clipped beard), and 'Sensuality' in the red and pendulous underlip. What is one to make

of a face combining these antagonistic traits ?

I was shown into the dining-room at the Court—a room that always chilled me, for the sun never enters it, and it is made more gloomy by the shadow of the firs that skirt that side of the house closely. But I was not left there long in solitude, for presently I heard a quick pattering of feet upon the stairs, and a minute after the door opened, and Olive with her fair complexion and bright sunny hair, and in a light morning gown, came in like a ray of light, panting for breath with the haste she had made.

'Dear Dr. Harvey !' she exclaimed, resting her hands on my arms and raising her cheek to be kissed. 'I have been hoping you would come, for papa said he should ask you to call—and it is so long since I saw you !'

'Why, that is not my fault,' said I, 'for I've called three or four times in the last

month with the hope of seeing you ; but you have been out, I suppose, every time.'

'No, each time I was at home. Once I stood quite close to you as you passed along the path there, through the firs ; but,' she added, dropping her voice as a vague fear fell upon her face, 'dared not come to you.'

'Surely, my dear,' said I tentatively, 'no one forbade you to speak to me.'

'Oh, no, no ! I cannot tell what it was I feared. A spell seemed to come upon me —just as when Harry came and I stood upon the stairs, unable to move, yet trying to run down to him.'

'And you felt no reluctance to come to me now ?' I asked in perplexity.

'None.'

'Ah, well, that's a sign the spell is broken,' said I, laughing to conceal my misgivings from her ; 'but if this kind of thing occurs again, mind, I shall feel it necessary to insist upon seeing you—not as an indulgent

friend, but as a most uncompromising doctor of medicine.'

This nonsense brought the smile back to her cheek, and she led me upstairs to the drawing-room, where I found Mrs. Lawson sitting beside a tambour frame, at which she had been working probably when my visit was announced. She rose to meet me with some embarrassment, for though I have never ceased to call at the Court occasionally, this is the first time we have met as friends since the death of her first husband. I have visited as the friend of Mr. Lawson, and always been received either by him or by Olive—for whose sake I have kept up this semblance of friendship with the stepfather. She gave me her delicate little hand as she murmured something about the past in a tone of apology.

'Not a word upon that head, madam,' said I hastily. 'We will fancy we met no longer ago than yesterday. And looking in

your face, 'tis no difficult matter on my part to forget the lapse of time.'

This was not quite the fact, but a compliment never comes amiss to a lady. Her hair is quite white now, but her face and figure still retain some of the delicate grace and prettiness which distinguished her in the old days.

We chatted about the weather, the crops, and such matters for some time, and then at length I said :

'Now, come, madam ; I must ask you to tell me what is the matter with you, for, though I have been watching attentively, I can detect nothing to account for Mr. Lawson's uneasiness.'

Mrs. Lawson turned to Olive, and they both smiled.

'There is positively nothing the matter with me. I eat and sleep well, I have no cough, no pain, and I am fairly active for an old woman. But my husband is so dread-

fully anxious about us, that the slightest thing alarms him.'

'Oh, papa is continually thinking that we are unwell—one and the other,' said Olive.

I looked at her and then at her mother in perplexity. There was no sign in either of an attempt to deceive each other or me; no semblance of that trepidation which I believed was inspired by Lawson. It was incomprehensible.

'Now, what was it, dear,' said Mrs. Lawson reflectively, turning to Olive; 'what was it that alarmed your papa last night?'

'I think it was your remark that you should like to make your will.'

'Ah, yes, that was it. If one did not know Mr. Lawson's freedom from vulgar prejudice, one would think that he shared the common superstition that making a will is an omen of approaching death.'

'May I ask if anything had suggested to you the advisability of making a will?'

Mrs. Lawson turned away from Olive slightly, as if conscious that her daughter was regarding her with anxiety, and made no reply for a moment. In that moment I detected on both their faces evidence of that suppressed terror which I had previously looked for in vain.

'Nothing has occurred,' said Mrs. Lawson with hesitation. Then, meeting my eye, she added, 'nothing of a physical kind.'

'That implies that something not of a physical kind has occurred.'

'Nothing that I can explain to you, Doctor, or to anyone.'

'Do you wish to relieve Mr. Lawson from his anxiety on your account?'

'Certainly,' she replied, in a firmer tone.

'Then, my dear madam, you must conceal nothing from your doctor. For so long as you do, you give cause of anxiety to everyone who loves you.' I glanced significantly at Olive. 'I will lighten your difficulty if I

may. Tell me if the superstition you referred to just now had crossed your mind —if in connection with the idea of making your will the fear of dying suddenly came before you.'

Mrs. Lawson bowed her head, compressing her lips to control their quivering ; then, after a moment's silence, she said in a low tone : 'I confess that it did.'

'Mother!' exclaimed Olive, seizing Mrs. Lawson's hand.

'Then, my dear madam,' said I, 'take your doctor's advice—make your will at once, and get this pernicious nonsense out of your head.'

'That is exactly what I felt I ought to do, Doctor,' she replied, looking up into my face with gratitude. 'I mentioned it to Mr. Lawson last night on that account. He would not listen to it ; but I wish to do it none the less. Can you tell me whom I ought to consult in the matter ?'

'I know the very man,' said I, and pulling out a note-book, I wrote the address of my friend Fawcett, of Maidstone, and handed it to her.

'Thank you very much,' she said, reading the note. 'I will write to Mr. Fawcett this afternoon.'

'And so will I,' said I to myself.

CHAPTER IX.

JUNE TWENTY-FIFTH AND TWENTY-SIXTH.

'Will you come round the garden with me?' Olive asked, as we were going down-stairs.

'With all my heart,' I replied. 'You have proposed the very thing that was in my mind.'

She put on a garden-hat, and, slipping her hand through my arm, led me into the grounds at the back of the house. Crossing the lawn, she said:

'I want to talk to you upon a subject that I couldn't mention before mamma. Have you seen Harry?'

'Wait a bit, my dear,' said I. 'Why couldn't you mention that subject before your mother?'

'Oh, I cannot tell you how terribly it affects her! We dare not speak of him before her.'

'Why, this is most unnatural; for, granting that as a lad he was wanting in the respect due to his mother, and has been neglectful in his duties as a son, his offence is insufficient to explain this deep and lasting antipathy.'

'It is something more than antipathy—she dreads him. The thought of him seems to inspire her with—I scarcely like to whisper it even to you, Doctor—with the terror of personal violence, as if she thought that poor Harry could execute some fearful act of vengeance upon her for having married papa.'

'Tell me, Olive—for there must be no reserve between us—do you think that

this fear of violence is connected with your mother's desire to make her will?'

'I am certain of it,' she replied in a low tone, and with conviction. 'I saw it at once by my mother's emotion—by her resolution to make her will at once as a means of overcoming a feeling which she herself knows it is wrong to encourage—just as one walks under a ladder, or does anything else that is said to be unlucky, in order to prove to one's self that there is no truth in vulgar superstition.'

I have no belief in the existence of supernatural premonitions; nevertheless, I was struck by this strange coincidence: the fear that she should die by the hand of her son must have come to Mrs. Lawson at the very time that Harry was fixing the date of coming to me, and that was but a step to making himself an inmate of Higham Court.

'Can you account in any way for your

mother's unreasonable fear and yours?' I asked.

'Oh, mine? That is nothing,' she exclaimed.

'Pardon me, it is something, and of very grave importance; for the explanation of your fear may throw light upon your mother's condition. Come, my dear, answer me candidly and freely. To-day you are unconstrained, natural, and as an ordinary girl in good health should be. But you are not always so. For some time I have noticed with growing uneasiness signs of reserve and secret agitation in your manner, and they are becoming more and more pronounced. I have been here three times, and you avoided meeting me. When we last met at the railway-station you were clearly under the influence of fear. Now, tell me, whom do you fear?'

'No one,' she answered, looking me straight in the face without the slightest

sign of deception in her voice or countenance. 'Whom should I fear? I am inmate with no one, excepting you, mamma, and papa.'

'Ha!—of course you do not fear him.'

'Papa!' she exclaimed in astonishment. 'Why, no one can be kinder than he is.'

Again I looked in her face, trying to discover if she might not be deceiving herself; but her brown eyes met mine without winking, and her pretty face was as open as the day.

'But the fear exists, and must have some cause,' I said in desperation.

'If it exists I am not conscious of it. Sometimes I feel stupid; but I suppose I am not an exceptional girl in that respect, Doctor,' said she, smiling. 'I fear appearances have led you to exaggerate our condition, both mamma's and mine, serious as mamma's is. You must not think be-

cause the attack has been rather severe lately that stupidity is my normal condition.' Again she smiled lightly. 'I have confessed to feeling spell-bound and dreamy, but I am only in that condition at very rare intervals, and mamma is as seldom agitated. We live very happily—a quiet, eventless life; and, if I may find fault with anything in it, it is the absence of emotion or incident to stir up our spirits.'

'Well, my dear, it is something to know that, at any rate.'

'And now,' she said, pressing my arm, 'do tell me about Harry.'

Seeing that nothing was to be gained by pursuing the other subject, I yielded to her persuasion, and told her about her brother: how he treasured her purse, and how he attributed a great and good change in his disposition to its influence, and how he was working steadily, and with a resolution to lead a more useful and a better life than

he had led. But I thought it advisable to say nothing about Mary Smith, nor his intention to come to Higham Court. And this put the dear girl in very good spirits, so that her fair face took a brighter colour and her eyes shone with happiness.

'I should like to write to him,' she said. 'Can you give me his address?'

'To be sure, my dear;' and then, having written his address at Brixton on a leaf of my note-book, I gave it her, saying that a letter would certainly find him there up to Monday next. 'But,' I added, 'this information is only for you.'

'No one shall know it,' she replied. 'You may be sure of that, for I have no one to tell; I have told you how it affects mamma to hear of Harry.'

'I was thinking rather of Mr. Lawson.'

'Oh, papa never inquires into my affairs. He is the least inquisitive of men; and, then, Harry has shown such unforgiving

hostility that I shrink from speaking of my brother to him almost as much as to my mother.'

She came with me to the drive, patted my pony, kissed me in parting, and waved her hand to me when I turned the corner by the gate with not a shadow of fear on her face. And now, this perplexing me as much as her previous behaviour, I resolved to go over in the afternoon and talk it over with Fawcett, as I at first intended.

I found my friend in his office, and gave him pretty much the account of my visit to Higham Court that I have set down here. He heard me out, for a wonder, without making any unpleasant observations, and then, tilting his chair back, looked up at the ceiling of his dingy room, reflectively stroking his nose with the tip of his quill pen.

'Eliminating the cock-and-bull element,' he began slowly.

'What do you mean by the cock-and-bull element, Fawcett?' I asked testily.

'It's pretty obvious why you were requested to call upon Mrs. Lawson instead of Dr. Heath, and why Mrs. Lawson asked you to recommend a legal adviser.'

'Ah, well, I shall be glad to know that, for it puzzled me.'

'By the cock-and-bull element I mean the vapourings of these two hysterical women, to which you seem to attach so much importance. If you weren't an old bachelor you'd know better, and as a doctor you ought to be ashamed of yourself for not being able to do without a wife. What have these two lazy women to do but to fancy this and fancy that, and make themselves a nuisance in general to all who know them? For the first year of her married life Mrs. Fawcett had palpitations, sinkings, swimmings, nerves, every sort of nonsense you can conceive. Why? Because she

had nothing in the world to do but to lollop about in armchairs and on sofas, and rake out ideas from trashy novels. Now that she has half a dozen children, and more work in one day than she can get through in twenty-four hours, she's not troubled with that sort of folly—hasn't got time to think what might be the matter with her.'

'It's unfair to judge all women by one standard, Fawcett, and——'

'Puzzled? Of course you were! You are just the sort of man who'd look through a telescope to find a smut on his nose! Here's the explanation. Mrs. Lawson is going to leave all her property to her husband. You were called in and asked to nominate me, in order that the will may not be set aside by St. John—your friend—pleading undue influence. Lawson will call you, as a medical man and a friend of the first husband and his family, to

prove that Mrs. Lawson, at the time of making her will, was in sound health; and I, as a lawyer nominated by you, shall prove that I had no interest in drawing up the deed in favour of Mr. Lawson.'

'What!' I exclaimed incredulously; 'you believe that this is the result of a systematic arrangement between Mrs. Lawson and her husband?'

'I see no reason to doubt it; and I can find no other explanation for Lawson calling you in instead of the family medico to see his wife, or for Mrs. Lawson choosing me to make her will instead of her husband's solicitor. It's evident that under any other condition, St. John, being disinherited, would be in a position to give Mr. Lawson a great deal of trouble—put him to the expense of a lawsuit, and leave his expenses to be paid out of the estate.'

'That may be right enough; but I cannot believe that Mrs. Lawson was

practising a deception on me, and with the collusion of her daughter Olive.'

'Why not? They did you no harm, and they obtained their object. What's the objection?'

'The objection!' I cried hotly. 'Why, the objection that they would be mean tricksters.'

'You think women are guileless because you believe they are fools. I know nothing about them. Quite willing to take them at your valuation. Only I can't see what satisfaction you are going to derive from finding that you've been cheated by a couple of idiots.'

'They are neither fools nor rogues,' I said, rising indignantly; 'and I decline to believe that a woman who does not enter in one category must necessarily belong to the other.'

'Trust no one, and avoid unpleasant consequences. Safest plan. Look upon every-

body as a probable rogue; and anything you learn to the contrary later on must come as an agreeable surprise.'

I would not wait to hear more. No, I did not stay even to shake hands with him, so that I am still in doubt whether he will consent to act as legal adviser to Mrs. Lawson if she asks him. But I incline to think he will, for, despite his brusquerie and incivility, I believe he likes me as well as he can like anyone, and will do what he may to persuade Mrs. Lawson to dispose of her estate justly, if only because he knows it would please me.

* * * * *

Mr. Lawson called upon me this morning to know what impression I had received with regard to Mrs. Lawson's condition from my interview with her yesterday. I told him candidly that I had detected no symptoms of any disease that called for medical treatment.

'Well, Doctor,' said he in a tone of reluctance, 'I purposely avoided telling you what it is that disquiets me, thinking it better to let you discover it from your own observation; but since there was evidently no manifestation in your presence, I think it right to tell you that Mrs. Lawson is the victim of a morbid dread, a most unnatural fear of'—he glanced round and lowered his voice cautiously—'of her son.'

'I am aware of that, Mr. Lawson.'

'Well, sir, do you see nothing abnormal in that?' he asked, in surprise. 'Surely, if there is truth in the axiom, "Mens sana in corpore sano," one must conclude that an unhealthy mind is due to an unhealthy body.'

'Possibly; but I cannot see what physic can do in a case like this. If Mrs. Lawson derives any benefit from my visits, it will not be because I am a doctor, but because I am an old friend.'

'That is the very thought that occurred to me. You may dispel her unhappy illusions and break down the monstrous barrier that exists between her and Mr. St. John. I look at it in this way, Doctor. An antipathy (whether justifiable or not I will not venture to discuss) was created in Mrs. Lawson's heart by the behaviour of her son many years ago ; and, through her seclusive and reflective habits, that antipathy has grown to its present unnatural proportions. Now, I consider that anything which may change her habit must do her good, and I regard it as a great achievement that we have persuaded her to overcome her prejudice to you. It looks like—I believe it is—the beginning of a return to a healthier and better condition ; and I have very little doubt that, by your influence, a great evil may be overcome. I can only hope that you will be generous enough to help me in this—not only for my

wife's sake, but for the sake of Olive. For, to confess all and at once, her condition has alarmed me scarcely less than Mrs. Lawson's. At times she seems so bewildered and dazed, so powerless to execute her own impulses, so strange in many ways, that I am led to fear she inherits something of her mother's morbid tendencies. Those tendencies are naturally stimulated by constant association with Mrs. Lawson, and by that shyness and love of solitude which isolates her to a certain degree. She has absolutely no friends of her own age, she never goes out except as a duty, or visits anyone save for the ordinary purposes of parochial charity. I must admit—though I am a serious man myself—that I think she is too serious for a young woman of her age, and that she has not the zest for pleasure and amusement which seems natural to a girl in good health.'

He continued to talk in this way for some

time; and I could only say 'Yes' and nod acquiescence in every argument he put forward. For he said nothing which was not perfectly reasonable, charitable, and kind; and, indeed, showed himself quite as well acquainted with the whole matter as I did —if not better.

'Mind, Doctor,' said he in conclusion, as he rose to go, 'though I ask you to visit as a friend—and as a friend you cannot come to us too often—I shall take account of every call, and regard it as strictly professional when I am balancing up my financial year.'

He lingered to chat awhile about medical literature—going round the shelves reading the title of one book, taking down another to glance inside, just as his eye was attracted by the fresher binding that distinguished them from the older works.

'I see you are conservative in your taste, Doctor,' said he; 'there's not a book here

that hasn't the classical stamp of antiquity.'

'I have no sympathy with modern science,' said I; 'I'm too old to learn.'

'What's true is not new, and what's new is not true, hey?'

'That's my feeling, at any rate. Hydropathy, Homœopathy, Electropathy, Fiddle-fiddle-pathy—I know none of these, and if my patients are not content with my plain old allopathy, they can go to a younger man and submit to his experiments.'

'And come back to you to bring them round again in the end.'

He beamed on me with his bilious smile approvingly as he gave me his clammy hand to shake, and went away.

'Why do I dislike this man against all these proofs of his honesty and high intelligence?' I asked myself. But from this and other kindred reflections I was aroused by Morton, who, with his wife, had been

hard at work arranging the front bedroom for Mary Smith.

'If you please, sir,' said he, 'we've about done upstairs, except that Hann thinks some nice white musling curtings would look more gayer and cheerfuller like than the old chintz.'

'Why, to be sure, so they would. Drive over to Sevenoaks this afternoon and buy them.'

'Yussir; and, if you please, Hann was saying that, as an housekeeper, Miss Smith ought to have a sitting-room to herself.'

'Perfectly right. Now, what room can we give Miss Smith, Morton?'

'Well, sir, there's the morning-room.'

'Hum, rather dull in the afternoon, when the sun goes off, eh?'

'Uncommon dull, sir. Then there's your consulting-room.'

'Ah! to be sure. There's a nice look-out over the garden, and the veranda

keeps the sun off in the afternoon. And as for the patients, they can come in here just as well as in there. How about the curtains there?'

'Well, sir, new muslings would freshen it up a bit, and a flower-stand——'

'The very thing. Here's a note. Buy what is necessary, and if that isn't enough, let me know, my good fellow.'

'Thank you, sir. Hann hopes we ain't presumin', sir. but we're most anxious that Miss Smith should feel quite satisfied when she comes.'

I just note this, because it seems to me that the disinterested kindness of those good people should be remembered. Many old servants would have resented the coming of a housekeeper, and might have done their utmost to make her uncomfortable and dissatisfied.

CHAPTER X.

JUNE TWENTY-SEVENTH TO JULY FIRST.

It has been raining steadily all day, and the glass is still low. We have been praying for it the last ten days, and heartily, too, morning and night, after a stretch of two hours with the watering-pot, and it has come not an hour too soon, for the beans have made no perceptible growth in the last fortnight, and the marrowfats are not half the size they should be. 'Twill knock the roses about and beat down the annuals, to be sure; but they will suck up fresh life, and, lord! how they will come on again when this spell of wet is past! Already the foliage looks a world healthier and more

vigorous, and the smell of the soaking earth is most delightful.

As I had no occasion, thank goodness ! to visit any patients, I have spent best part of the day in smartening up the place for my coming visitors. I trimmed the creepers from one end of the veranda to the other, thinning out the growth, drawing up straggling sprigs, etc., and it looks all the better for it, and so it should, for I was at it the whole morning. Then I contrived stands at the base of the veranda columns, and on these I massed all my potted flowers from the cool-house, and the effect of this pleases me prodigiously, for coming out of the house on to the terrace and looking down the veranda one sees these bright clumps of colours in perspective, with the creepers rising from their midst and stretching away above them in a delicate canopy. This kept me hard at work all the afternoon, for I would not call Morton away, he being

equally busy inside the house nailing down a new carpet, which he had the foresight to buy yesterday at Sevenoaks, putting up new curtains and furbishing up the consultation-room for Mary Smith. And a capital job he and Ann have made of it, having transformed a comfortless room into an elegant and cosy retreat, which I think cannot fail to please Mary.

The *coup d'œil* as you go out of the room through the French windows on to the terrace, with my 'Gloria' pelargoniums massed on one side, and my Begonia floribundus on the other, is quite charming. Besides new carpets and curtains there are some soft white rugs here and there, a writing-table at one window and a work-table at the other. These, and other dainty accessories, have been furnished through Morton's forethought rather than my consideration, I am ashamed to say. And now I feel thoroughly beat out by my day's

exertions, but highly satisfied with the result, all the same. And I do hope, with all my heart, that these efforts, and my further endeavours, may have a good influence upon Mary Smith's life. Nevertheless, I do not wish to disguise from myself the fact that it is a venture, and nothing more ; nor am I unprepared to meet failure with equanimity, for it would be absurd to suffer bitter disappointment in the defeat of an enterprise which is supported mainly by hope and faith in the innate goodness of a woman's heart. Mary Smith has undoubtedly sinned, and may sin again ; and albeit in a quiet village like this there is less danger of slipping than in a crowded city, yet there may be temptations in her way which she will not have the strength to resist ; for I must bear in mind that life to a young person of strong imagination and lively passions bears a different aspect to that which is seen by such old eyes as

mine. Yes, I know the risk I run; I am conscious that the course I am trying would be condemned by prudence (and perhaps ridiculed by such men of the world as Fawcett), nevertheless, I do not regret the step I have taken, and no slight rebuff shall deter me from going on. Nor will I attempt to be worldly-wise; for though prudence may lead a man to avoid doing foolish things, I doubt if it ever helped him to do an unselfish one.

Looking over this page, I find that my exertions of yesterday made me particularly prosy at night; and I fear that an impartial critic reading what is not designed for his eye would set me down for an egotistical old fool, with a good deal of that pride which apes humility. Well, if my remarks sound egotistical, I trust the fault proceeds from feeling uncommonly sleepy, and nothing more. I am certainly not drowsy now,

having had Fawcett here this morning to wake me up.

'Poisoning plants for want of patients,' said he, coming into the house where I was watering a box of seedlings.

'Why, what has brought you here on such a day as this?' said I, turning in surprise.

'Killing time to keep your hand in?' he continued, following his own vein of humour.

'Come in and have a cigar,' said I, setting down the pot and taking his hand.

'What's brought me here? Didn't you yourself tell me that I should have to go to Higham Court?'

'Oh, you have been to see Mrs. Lawson?'

'No; go on with your dribbling. We'll have that cigar when I've said my say. Can see through the doors here, and be sure there's no eavesdropping.'

'You may be just as easy on that point indoors as here.'

'Yes,' said he, seating himself on my potting-table, 'I've seen Mrs. Lawson, and you'll be glad to hear that for once in my life I made a mistake.'

'Ha, ha!' said I, chuckling. 'You've come upon an agreeable surprise already with regard to that lady, have you?'

'Not so sure of that,' said he, giving me a direct answer for the first time, as he pulled the end of his long nose reflectively. 'It's in the forecast of her will that I made a mistake. I have no hesitation in telling you how she intends to dispose of her property, because it must have been a foregone conclusion on her part that I should do so, and I don't care a rap for professional etiquette.'

'Ha! Mrs. Lawson intends to bequeath part of the estate to St. John?'

'Nor a rap for Mrs. Lawson or anyone else,' he added, disregarding my suggestion. 'And you may tell 'em so, sir.'

'There's no necessity to make you appear more disagreeable than you are.'

'Not a penny piece. St. John will get nothing. I went into the whole affair, showed her that her first husband undoubtedly intended that both children should have a share of the property, and then advised the stupid woman to cut the estate into three parts, and leave part to Mr. Lawson, part to her daughter, and another part to her son. No good.'

'She will leave it all, then, to her husband?'

'Wasn't that my forecast, and haven't I told you I was wrong? With the exception of a very trifling legacy to her husband, she leaves all to her daughter Olive.'

'You surprise me.'

'It surprised me. Explained it in this way: Her first husband left all to her to dispose of as the conduct of her children directed; she discharges her trust by leaving

all to Olive to dispose of as the conduct of her brother suggests.'

'Why, that seems perfectly logical and reasonable.'

'As confounded a piece of folly as ever I heard of.'

'But Olive is a good girl. She loves her brother devotedly, as her mother knows.'

'However, I've tried my best, and all that remains to be done is to draw up a will in accordance with the testator's wish.'

'Well, this is much better than ever I dared to hope,' said I.

'Don't know about that. Not so sure about Miss Olive. Never knew a carroty-headed girl yet that could be depended on.'

'There's not a more lovable, honest young woman in the world, I'll answer for it.'

'Nor any other girl, as for that,' he added, concluding his reflection, as he tilted his head back to scratch his grizzly throat.

'Olive an honest young woman—well, we shall see when she gets thirty thousand pounds into her hands. And perhaps you will be greatly astonished if she turns her back on Mr. Harry St. John and sticks to the lot. *I* shan't. That's enough of them for this morning. Now we'll go and have that cigar and a bottle of Morgon.'

And not another word could I get out of him on this subject.

Well, this disposes of all doubt as to the honesty of Mr. Lawson, and puts out of court any suspicion of his exercising a power for evil over Mrs. Lawson. And this should serve—as I hope it may—to prevent me from forming any uncharitable opinion of persons from prejudice inspired by mere personal appearances.

* * * * *

The wind has gone round to the north again ; there was a rift in the clouds about mid-day ; this evening the sunset was superb,

with only a stray cloud or two in the sky (and they flushed with warm promise), and the barometer is steadily moving for 'Set fair.' This just falls out as I wish, for the rain of the last two days has soaked deep into the earth, the vegetation stands up strengthened and refreshed by its hearty draught, and all that is needed is a day of warm sunshine to expand the buds and make the garden a perfect picture by Monday. (Mem.—To rake the borders and have the paths swept before breakfast.) Made a long round to-day; firstly, because it is Saturday, and, secondly, because I wish to be perfectly free on Monday. On my way home, called at Higham Court. Found Mr. Lawson writing in his study—bland, as usual, and most amiable, despite the interruption. He assured me that his wife was more composed than she had been for some time, and, telling me I should find her with Olive upstairs, begged me to excuse him, as

he was anxious to finish an address he had to prepare for the young people of the Sunday-school. Olive was reading aloud to her mother, who sat working by the window. She dropped her book with a cry of pleasure on seeing me, and came across the room to greet me with that impulsive alacrity which I love to see in girls. Mrs. Lawson seemed also very pleased to see me, and listened with lively interest to the anecdotes and scraps of news I had picked up in my day's visits. Olive sat opposite me, and at a little distance from her mother, and it pleased me to observe the sympathetic happiness in her pretty face as she watched the smiling animation with which the elder lady turned from her work now and then to comment upon some item of gossip that amused her.

'And now, madam,' said I, when I had exhausted my budget, 'what have you to tell me?'

'Well, Dr. Harvey,' she replied, bending over her frame, 'I have seen your friend Mr. Fawcett.'

'And an uncommonly strange, uncouth kind of man you found him, I'll be bound.'

'Certainly he gave one no reason to doubt his sincerity,' she replied, with a look of amusement. 'He warned me, before I opened the subject of my wishes, that he should probably tell you all that I chose to say to him.'

'That did not prevent you from laying your purpose before him?'

'No; there is no reason for secrecy in the matter. My husband and Olive know how I wish to dispose of my property, and I am not afraid to let you know also, Doctor. May I ask if Mr. Fawcett has spoken to you on the subject?'

'He has, madam; and I must tell you frankly that I was extremely pleased to hear of the simple and reasonable means by

which you overcame the difficulties of your position.'

She inclined her head, and, after a little sigh, said lightly :

'Well, the terrible deed is done. I received a copy of the will last night, and this morning it has been duly signed and witnessed. And now,' she added, looking affectionately at Olive, 'I have only to hope that all will be for the best.'

I also looked at Olive. The girl's eyes were suffused with a tear at the thought that one day she must lose her mother ; but there was an expression of earnest purpose on her face, telling as plainly as words that she had fully decided how the fortune shall be appropriated when it comes to her.

'Yes,' said I, rising, 'as matters stand, this is for the best. And it is always possible to make another will if your heart prompts you to make a better partition of your estate. Such a prompting you will

have, I do believe ; and that,' I added, taking her hand and pressing it, ' before very long.'

* * * * *

The sun never shone more brightly than when I drove to the station this morning, and there was just breeze enough to temper the heat of the sun. It was delightful even to walk up and down the platform with nothing to see but the mellow sunlight, and deep purple shadows, and the metals running away to a point in the distance, and looking like threads of polished silver, and a shimmer of heat hanging over the scorched track. I hadn't been waiting there above twenty minutes, when the semaphore went up with a rattle, an electric bell tinkled, a porter came out and rang another bell, and presently I caught sight of a puff of white steam in the vanishing point of the glittering lines. After that I had only time to walk to the extremity of the platform, shut up my umbrella, and stand back, before the

train rushed in, but so quickly that I could make out nothing with respect to the passengers. However, as it came to a stand, and I was looking this way and that, in all directions but the right one, and with a grievous misgiving that my friends had missed their train, I heard a big mellow voice say : 'There's the blessed old Doctor,' and then, looking straight in front of me, I discovered St. John blocking the whole of the window with his great shoulders, and his fine, handsome face aglow with a smile of real affection. Out he came, grasping my hand as the door opened, and when he was out I could see into the compartment, and not before.

Mary was seated there, still looking very thin, and more serious by contrast with St. John's exuberant jollity. Poor girl! I dare say there flashed upon her mind at that moment, as it flashed upon mine, a memory of that awful night when last I had come to take her from the compartment of a train.

CHAPTER XI.

JULY FIRST.

I HELPED Mary Smith to alight while St. John went to the rear of the train to see about the luggage.

'My dear,' said I, still holding her hand as we stood on the platform, 'you look still a little pale; I hope the journey has not fatigued you over-much.'

'No, no,' she protested; 'I am quite well again now; and if it were not for the pleasure of seeing Dr. Harvey,' she added, with a pretty smile and a graceful inclination of the head, 'I should regret that the journey is ended.'

'I am glad to find that coming through Kent has had that effect upon you.'

'Oh, it is beautiful! See,' said she, indicating the packet of periodicals I had taken from the carriage, 'Mr. St. John bought all those magazines and papers to look through on the way down, and we have not opened a single one.'

'That speaks as much for your charms as for those of the scenery,' said I. 'An older man than Mr. St. John would find something more agreeable to think about, or to make you think about, than the pictures in illustrated papers.'

One can be courteous without being insincere; though I find that compliment is falling into contempt, and that even well-bred people affect a brusquerie which amounts to rudeness almost. But it seems to me that the omission to utter one's thoughts kindly, or to present an idea in an agreeable form, points to ungracious care-

lessness and poverty of spirit rather than to a superabundance of honesty.

These reflections did not occur to me just then, for my thoughts were better occupied in putting my precepts into practice. There was but little difficulty in that, to be sure; for I took a sincere interest in the happiness of Mary Smith; her unaffected manners, and a certain dignity and refinement that distinguished every look and gesture, commanded my respect, and her appearance won my admiration. Her face, though—I must say it again—lamentably thin, was beautiful by the delicacy of her features and the vivacity and intelligence of her deep, dark eyes; her figure was lithe and graceful, and she was dressed as handsomely as any young woman of my acquaintance.

Everything she wore was in admirable taste—nothing was obtrusive; and yet the general effect was noticeably striking. A

close observer, however, would have noticed one peculiarity in it. Everything was quite new. Clearly St. John had given with an open hand; and I was glad of this, not only because it testified to his generosity and the largeness of his heart—as a lad he was ever prodigal of his own possessions—but for the girl's sake. For it certainly elevates one's sentiments to feel that one is well dressed, just as it chases ignoble thoughts from one's mind to find one's self in the midst of grand scenery. Though I believe that Mary Smith in the plainest homespun would still look a lady, just as Harry St. John, despite his gray flannel and threadbare tweeds, his pipe and ungloved hands, must strike all who look at him as being distinctly a gentleman.

The pony-carriage was outside the station. Mary and I took the back seats, and St. John the little one in front, resting his feet on the steps outside the better to accommo-

date his long legs. I woke Bessy up with a flick of the whip, and off we started.

'Do you know how to drive, my dear?' I asked Mary.

'No; I have never been in a carriage before. Is it difficult to drive?'

'Not very, if you only let Bess have her own way. And that way is to draw up by the side of the road and stop when anything is coming, to keep well in the middle of the road when anything is following, and to walk very steadily round the corners. You must learn, for you may like to drive out alone, and go farther than you can walk.'

'Or fetch a visitor from the station without obliging him to sit in front and dangle his feet over the splash-board,' added St. John. 'Ha! they are mowing the grass; I can smell the new hay.'

'Is it hay that smells so sweet?' asked

Mary, in such surprise that I do believe she had never smelt it before. 'I have been wondering what it was!'

'Look!' said St. John; 'look at that big bee keeping pace with us. I know where the fat fellow is going to—he's after the wild thyme on Wrotham Hill.'

With such simple chatter as this we got over the ground, and it pleased me more than I can tell to note the child-like eagerness with which Mary seized on all the delights that Nature offered in lane and hop-garden and wheat-field, and the gently undulating landscape that spread beyond, with its circling horizon of hazy hills. The glow of health already seemed to be mantling in her cheek and shining in her eyes. And when at length we reached home, there was Morton at the gate raising one finger to his forehead respectfully, and Anne at the front-door, in a cap and apron white as falling snow, her

skirts starched out as stiff as tin, and her features composed with not less rigidity to meet her new mistress with a becoming courtesy.

'You will show Miss Smith her room, Ann,' said I; 'and when you come down, my dear,' I added, turning to Mary, 'you will probably find St. John at the bottom of the garden yonder, amongst the raspberries.'

And whether it was to please me or himself I can't say, but Harry went straight to the raspberry-canes, and was there when Mary came out. We could just see his head bobbing up and down above them For I would let Mary go no further before she had seen my roses; and as I pointed them out one after the other, telling her their names, I cut off those buds she most admired, binding them round with a strip of bast from my pocket. She took the flowers in silence and bent over them, breathing

their perfume for a minute, then raising her eyes to mine with almost pathetic earnestness—seeing how slight the attention on my part was—she said in a low voice :

'I will keep these flowers, in memory of to-day, as long as I live.'

'Wait a bit,' called St. John from the canes. 'You may be first at the start, Doctor, but you've got to reckon with me at the finish ;' and with that he blundered out of the canes, trampling down a row of young beans, and joined us with a pile of fine berries in a fresh cabbage leaf. We all ate and laughed ; but yet a shade of uneasiness crossed my mind then (and it returns to me now) with the thought that maybe, for their future happiness, it would be better had they never met. When one sees a couple suited to each other as these two are—the very dissimilarity in their natures making one the complement of the other—one must think of their becoming one. 'Tis the fulfilment

of Nature's promise—the flower and fruit that one pictures with the first gleam of spring sunshine ; and the knowledge that this promise is never to be realized is sad as the prattle of a dying child.

Mary was pleased with her sitting-room in a quiet, undemonstrative way that showed she was not unaccustomed to comfortable surroundings. What charmed her most was the look-out over the lawn, with the glimpse of landscape over the arbutus hedge, and the prospect of sitting under the veranda with a book in her leisure hours. She was struck with the beauty of my begonias and the prettiness of the overhanging creepers. But she did not 'gush' over these things. I think she is shrewd enough to perceive the tendency of my vanity, and purposely restrained her admiration on that account. And this I take to be another evidence of natural good taste and refinement ; for surely nothing is more

vulgar than the open flattery of a man's weakness—which implies a contempt for his understanding—nor anything more displeasing, unless it be the eternal simper on the faces of those people who employ this kind of adulation.

We strolled into the drawing-room, and then Mary, catching sight of the case beside the piano, exclaimed, 'Oh, Dr. Harvey, you play the 'cello ?'

'Once upon a time, my dear, I used to think I could play ; but 'tis five years since I took the instrument out of its case.'

'And as long since you had the piano tuned !' said St. John, shutting it down with a bang of disgust after striking a couple of chords.

'Yes, that also has not been opened for five years. It never occurred to me that you might like to play, Mary, or I would have had it tuned for a certainty, though I should have known you for a musician by

your face and fingers. But I'll have the man from Maidstone to-morrow.'

'Can't wait for him,' said St. John; 'I'll do it myself this afternoon. It's not the first time I've earned a dinner by tuning a piano.'

Mary turned a look of surprise and tender sympathy upon him, a look that seemed to say, 'Ah! you, too, have known what it is to be hungry and poor; now I know why you first felt such compassion for me.'

And sure enough I was awakened from my customary afternoon doze, with the study blinds drawn, by a 'Trum, trum, jing, jing,' from the drawing-room, and on going in I found Harry at work and Mary sitting by, watching him in the silence of hero-worship. And remarkably well he did the job (though his only tool was a hand-vice found in my workshop), so that there was not one jarring note to mar the beauty of Mary's playing when we came home in the gloaming from our walk through the village.

At my wish she played some of Mendelssohn's Lieder; but the well-remembered melodies (rendered with excellent feeling, to be sure) touched an old wound that I fancied was long ago healed up, and set my old heart aching to such a degree that I was constrained to withdraw quietly from the room to take a turn up and down the terrace, where I might use my handkerchief without being seen or heard.

Presently the beautiful theme came to an end, and was followed almost immediately by a march; but this was played with such firmness and virile force that I knew St. John had taken Mary's place at the instrument; and this conviction was quickly proved, for as I was slipping my handkerchief in my pocket I felt a hand slipped gently under my other arm, and found Mary at my side. And now I felt pretty certain that St. John must have seen me go out, and, guessing the cause, said to Mary, 'The poor old fellow

has gone out. It's too much for him. He's thinking of his sister Madge, who used to play these things. Go and comfort him,' or something to that effect; though it's more likely that Mary did not wait for his bidding.

'Will you tell me about your sister Madge?' she asked, leading me further from the room.

'Why, my dear, she was only an old maid; and she has been dead five years,' said I.

'That is not long enough to forget. I could not forget you in five years. Does it pain you to talk about your sister?'

'On the contrary, I shall be glad to break this morbid silence. For though 'tis an unwholesome folly to foster mournful reflections, yet 'tis bad to go to the other extreme by avoiding the subject altogether. And instead of keeping the piano shut up all these years, I should have done well to

ask some young people in long ago, to bang it about and put an end to these idle sentiments. Nay,' said I, warming up to the spirit of my argument, 'I am resolved to get out my 'cello the first evening we are alone, and perform some of the old pieces to your accompaniment.'

'At least you will make me happy,' said she, drawing my arm a little closer. 'Now, tell me about your sister. She was not married?'

'No, Mary. Her lover died. And though she was pretty enough—as you shall see by her portrait, which I will show you to-morrow—to win many another suitor, she would marry none. It seemed as if she had given all her love away to her first and only lover. She was content to live with me to the last.'

'And that is why you never married?'

'Oh, that is quite another affair. You see, a doctor sees so many charming young

ladies that it would be an invidious distinction to prefer one. And, then, I have half a dozen hobbies, and a married man, if he would please his wife, should have none.'

'Can you look back five or six years, and tell me all that happened in a day?'

'Ah, I'll be bound I can if I try,' I replied; and then, fixing upon one of those past days, I told her as faithfully as I could all that happened in it, from the time I met my poor Madge at the breakfast-table to the hour we bade each other good-night, detailing the commonplace routine of our everyday life. She made many kind and pretty observations in the course of my narrative, and, when I came to the end, thanked me in a quiet, reflective tone that piqued my curiosity.

'Tell me,' said I, 'why this matter interests you so much, for besides kindliness of heart and womanly sympathy I perceive you have some other motive.'

'Supposing it is one of self-interest,' she said, with a little laugh, 'must I confess it?'

'Ay,' said I, 'now you have excited my curiosity to such a pitch that you must satisfy it.'

She was silent for a moment, then, pressing my arm, she said gravely and low, 'I want to shape my life by Miss Harvey's---to be something more than your housekeeper, so that in time to come people shall say of me, "That little old maid is a second sister to Dr. Harvey."'

I think it made me more sad than glad to hear this. To be sure, I felt nothing but delight at the proposal of having an amiable and well-bred companion who certainly would restore the happiness I had lost with my poor Madge, and it was satisfactory also to know that Mary had already realized the fact that St. John could never marry her; nevertheless, it grieved me to think that a young girl, charming and lovable in so many

ways, should abandon all hope of greater joys, and resign herself to the lifelong companionship of a crotchety old fogey like me.

All this time St. John had been thumping out marches, but now, probably growing tired of performing without an audience, he came out into the garden filling his pipe.

'By George,' he exclaimed, 'what a glorious night!'

Indeed, one or two stars were already beginning to twinkle overhead, and low down on the green horizon was sharply defined the young moon circling the faint disc of the old.

'Ha, see, my dear,' said I, slipping my arm round Mary's waist. 'There is the new moon that brought us this fine weather, and promises us good luck. Come here, Harry, you can see it just over the hop-kiln. Now, let's turn our money, and wish.'

And he and I put our hands in our pockets and turned the pieces over in silence —both with the same wish in our hearts,

maybe—that happiness might befall Mary Smith.

Surely there are times when one may be forgiven for fostering these old superstitions!

CHAPTER XII.

JULY SECOND AND THIRD.

St. John and I sat up late talking about many things. Amongst others, I told him of my conversation with Fawcett, my visits to Higham Court, and my reasons for believing that I had mistaken the character of Mr. Lawson.

'Yes,' said he, 'it looks as if we had certainly done him an injustice. I am chiefly responsible for the view you have taken of his character, and the only thing I can do now is to make the *amende honorable* as soon as possible.'

'When will you go there?' I asked.

'On Wednesday. I can't very well go

to-morrow, because I have to fetch a block I left at Brixton.'

'Ha, that reminds me. Have you had a letter from Olive?'

'No.'

'Then ten to one you will find one at Brixton, for I gave her your address, and I know she intended to write to you. Though you should have received her letter before, as I gave her to understand that you would be leaving there at the end of the week.'

He promised he would inquire for the letter; and then I asked him if he would like me to call at the Court and prepare his mother for the visit he is to make.

'Better not,' said he. 'My first affair is with Lawson. And I think, if he accepts my apology, he will be the proper medium for a reconciliation with my mother.'

And now I have just learnt from St. John, who returned from London in time to dine with us, that no letter has come to

Brixton from Olive, but that last night a man called at Arlingford Terrace and made many inquiries about Mary and himself, which adds considerably to my perplexity. For according to the description given by the woman of the house with respect to the personal appearance of this man, he can be none other than Mr. Lawson. Now, I had enjoined a kind of secrecy upon Olive, and I quite remember her promise that no one should see the address I gave her. Yet how could Mr. Lawson have known where to find Harry if not from information given him by Olive? This makes me uneasy.

It is pleasant to turn my thoughts from this subject to the events of the day at home here.

To begin with, then, I was surprised when I entered my study before breakfast to find how altered it was. It seemed as if a fairy had been there and touched it with

her wand, so much brighter and more cheerful was its aspect. And then I discovered that all this effect was due to some cut flowers on the chimney-piece, and a couple of my favourite picotees with a backing of maidenhair set in a glass of water on my desk. I have never thought it worth while to decorate the rooms in this way for myself, and Morton has left the vases unfilled, having no real love for the products of the garden—possibly because he has to water them night and morning in the dry weather—so that my study has not worn such a cheerful inhabited look since my poor Madge died. 'Tis marvellous how much one owes to trifles. 'And yet 'tis no trifle, either,' I reflected, taking up the picotees, 'for the hand that set these here was prompted by considerate thought and tender feeling. And what in the world is of greater consequence than these?'

I went along the terrace, and, peeping in at the open window, spied Mary at her desk, though it was not yet eight, and I had heard no sound of movement in the house.

She looked a very staid, neat little body, sitting there with a pile of tradesmen's books before her which Morton had already delivered into her charge, but very sweet and fresh in a bright morning gown and a business-like apron and bib. She was poring over the accounts with knitted brows, and an expression of fixed determination to master the difficulties of the situation. As she looked up, the severity vanished from her face and gave place to the happiest of smiles as she came to meet me.

'Why, my dear,' said I, 'I didn't expect to see you down for another hour.'

'On such a morning as this! Oh, that would be too bad! Besides, I heard from

Ann last night that you breakfast at eight, and love punctuality.'

'Ay, so I do. But be that as it may, we must put up with delay this morning, for I warrant St. John will not be down before the stroke of nine.'

'I think we shall find him in the workshop, wherever that may be, for Morton told me he was there an hour ago.'

'We must see that to believe it, Mary. Come; and show me, by the way, my dear, where you found those handsome picotees you were good enough to set on my table.'

The sun had dried the dew from the lawn save in the shade, where the foliage of the pansies still shone with moisture; the trees were quite still; the sun's rays were softened by a golden haze, fading away to a blue mist over the distant weald; butterflies were skimming over the borders; the young swallows twittered in the eaves, looking up at the older birds that swept

high above the gables with shrill whistle; the annuals (which never in my remembrance have bloomed more profusely) stood bolt upright, as if to withstand the coming heat, the standard roses rising here and there with queenly dignity in all the beauty of their prime; the air was laden with fragrance, and one couldn't help saying more than once: 'What a lovely morning! It's going to be a regular hot day. What capital weather for the hay!'

Standing there alone, I could not have looked around me and observed the prodigal beauty of Nature without delight; but my happiness was doubled a dozen times by the presence of Mary. She completed the picture which else had lacked something. She supplied the craving which I have so often felt in solitude for someone to partake with me in the delights which seemed too many for one. She is observant and appreciative, taking pleasure in the things that

most please me, and opening a wide field for hope in the keen interest she takes in her surroundings. (Mem.—To carry out her suggestion of moving the garden-seat to the corner under the sycamore, where, as she pointed out, one gets the fullest view of the garden and the Maidstone Hills.) I had forgotten all about St. John in the pleasure of singling out flowers for Mary's observation, when the tap of a chisel reminded me of his existence; and just then Morton came to say that the breakfast was served, so we hurried off to the workshop, where we found Harry at work, and wonderful progress he has made with the panel, to be sure. But ere I could admire his handiwork I was struck by his meeting with Mary, which made as pretty a picture as a painter could wish to produce. They stood hand in hand, silent for a minute with the undisguised happiness that shone in their faces. There was a tinge of colour on

Mary's cheek ; a ray of sunlight fell upon her small head and lit up the warmer tints in her dark hair ; and her features were beautified by the sweetness of her expression. And on his side the manly strength of his face was softened by a wonderful tenderness. Clearly it was not a want of fondness that had kept him at the bench while she was culling flowers for my room within the range of his vision ; no, rather I believe that it was love kept him there—that higher love which inspires a man with self-restraint when the real happiness of the one he loves is to be considered, and not the mere gratification of his own inclinations. And I honour St. John with all my heart for this self-control, and feel that I have not been mistaken in the confidence I placed in his honour and good feeling.

And turning from them, I could not help admiring his carving, and calling Mary to my side, I pointed out its excellence,

comparing it with my own feeble efforts. She examined it in pensive silence, and then looked up at Harry, who, with a grin of amusement on his face, was whetting his chisel on a stone. But though he grinned, she did not smile; there was still on her face that look of pensive awe, wondering, maybe, if there were any limits to the power of her hero.

'How about breakfast, Doctor?' said Harry. 'Seems to me I have lived a year or two in starvation since those confounded swallows woke me.'

'Ay, ay, we are forgetting breakfast. Come along. We won't waste another minute,' said I. Nevertheless, we stopped for fully two minutes in the middle of the lawn to look about and say once more 'What a lovely morning!' Oh, we must all three have felt that sentiment of complete happiness as we stood there. Let no one tell me that life is not worth living while it

is possible to feel like this, though only once or twice in our span.

We took St. John to the station after breakfast, and then extended our drive to Godden Green, Mary taking the reins and her first lesson in driving; and though this requires but little skill with a steed of Bessy's regular habits, yet there was just sufficient excitement to bring the colour into Mary's cheeks and make her eyes sparkle, and certainly it added to our pleasure in rambling through the pretty lanes.

St. John came back in the afternoon; in the evening we strolled through the meadows, and on our return I insisted upon having music, and that put an end at once to the sentimental objections I have cherished too long. I took out my violoncello, and having put it into tune, begged Mary to accompany me in Bishop's 'Love me Ever;' and as there is no need of modest

scruples here, I will say that after the third repetition I played my part admirably—albeit I have not touched the instrument for five years. Altogether this has been a most enjoyable day, full of pleasant incidents, and inspiring one with confident hope of the future so far as Mary Smith and her relations with us are concerned. And if I could only feel as confident in a happy issue to St. John's endeavour to-morrow, I believe there would be no more contented man in the world than I.

* * * * *

I started on my round of visits directly after breakfast this morning, and as the plants in the houses need attention I left Morton at home. Just as I crossed the railway bridge I caught sight of Olive coming up the steps from the station, As I pulled up, she hastened to join me with honest pleasure in her smiling face.

'Are you going homeward, my dear?' I asked, taking her hand.

'Yes. I have been down to the book-stall to fetch these papers for papa. Are you going through Ightham?'

'That I am; and if I were not I would go out of my way for the pleasure of a chat with you. All well at home?' I asked, as she took the seat beside me.

'Very well indeed. I have not seen mamma looking so bonny for a long while, and that of course makes me feel happier.'

'To be sure. Your mamma has taken a wise and a right step in making her will. It dispels an unwholesome illusion, and must lead to a still healthier condition.'

'Oh yes; I hope so. But you won't make that an excuse for staying away, will you, Dr. Harvey?'

'No, my dear. Up to now I have only had to find excuses for coming to see you. But that is all changed, happily. I will

call before long. I should have called before, but I have had visitors.'

She inclined her head and raised her eyebrows smilingly.

'Have I any reason to be jealous?' she asked, looking me in the face, and still smiling.

'None; for one of my visitors is not less dear to you than he is to me.'

The smile died away from her face, and she turned her eyes away uneasily.

'You can guess at once that he is your brother Harry,' I hastened to add.

I expected a joyful exclamation on her part, but she gave no sign either of surprise or delight. She sat perfectly silent, and the look of trouble deepened into one of absolute displeasure. Affecting not to perceive this unaccountable change, although it plunged me into the deepest perplexity, I said in as light a tone as I could assume:

'By-the-by, you did not write to him as you proposed.'

She shook her head in silence, looking straight before her with the unaltered expression of displeasure pinching her features.

'You lost the address I gave you?' I suggested, thinking that this might explain satisfactorily Mr. Lawson's discovery of St. John's residence and his subsequent visit.

'No, I have it in my pocket,' she replied coldly.

'Then will you tell me why you didn't write?'

'I cannot tell you. The desire to write to him passed away. That is the only explanation I can give.'

'That is strange. I can't understand it at all, unless you thought that the purpose of writing to Harry would be answered by the call Mr. Lawson made at Brixton.'

'What call?' she asked, turning with every appearance of unfeigned surprise.

'Surely you know that Mr. Lawson went to London, and called at Harry's lodgings on Monday.'

'I know papa went to London on Monday, but I know nothing of his calling upon my brother.'

'But you knew his intention when you gave him Harry's address?'

'I have shown no one the address. I have not mentioned Harry's name to anyone,' she affirmed with all the emphasis of truth.

I drew a long breath. I knew not what to believe. This mystification oppressed me like an incubus.

'Well, my dear,' said I, 'perhaps this strange coincidence will be explained this afternoon when St. John sees Mr. Lawson.'

'Is he coming to the Court?' she asked, with undisguised repugnance in her look and voice.

I answered in the affirmative, and was about to explain his object, when she interrupted me.

'He has no right to come to the Court. If he has not sufficient feeling to respect my mother's condition, he should at least have the good taste to abstain from visiting at a house where he is not wanted.'

Now, I could only regard her in speechless astonishment; for not only did her words express a positive antipathy, but her face, transfigured by passion, looked actually wicked with hate.

'My child!' I said at length, 'what does this mean? A week ago you were eager to fly into your brother's arms, and now——'

'And now,' she continued fiercely, interrupting me, 'I would not lift my finger to save his life if he were in peril. If you ask me to account for this change of feeling, I can only tell you that my mother is

dearer to me than all the world, and that the possibility of this visit being fatal to her turns every gentle feeling of my heart towards Harry into hatred and contempt.'

It seemed as if this extraordinary change of sentiment extended to her regard for me. For being now at the corner of Church Lane, she begged me coldly to stop, and gave me her hand, when I extended mine, almost with repugnance.

I hesitated for a minute or two in doubt whether I ought not to turn back and discuss this extraordinary position of affairs with Harry ; but thinking he would not start until after lunch, I resolved to get through my visits first, and think the matter over at the same time.

CHAPTER XIII.

JULY THIRD.

I GAVE Bess a touch with the whip (without which she would certainly be standing at the corner of Church Lane now), and as we jogged along, I turned over in my mind the details of the extraordinary scene I have just described. In the first place, I asked myself who was in the wrong — Olive or myself. Judging my own conduct by the light of reason and common-sense, I could see nothing in it to justify this sudden unmistakable outburst of hostility on the girl's part. To be sure, I have countenanced St. John's attempt to conciliate his mother, but since that is no more than an act of

filial duty on his part, I should have been blameworthy to oppose it. Nor could I think that I ought to have deterred him from approaching Mrs. Lawson because of the unreasoning dread she entertained of him, for she herself had shown that she regarded her terror as unnatural, and a thing to be overcome. For my own part, I entertained no misgivings of any ill-effect arising from an interview between Mrs. Lawson and her son, but rather anticipated a beneficial result. And then I asked myself whether this new-born antipathy to St. John exhibited by Olive was actually the result of fear on her mother's behalf, or merely the outcome of a new-born resentment which biased her reason. It seemed to me that this unnatural hatred of St. John might be the development of monomania inherited from her mother, and matured by constant association with that poor lady, and participation in her distorted ideas. This seemed

to me then, as it does now, the most feasible explanation of her peculiar conduct. Undoubtedly the change from Love to Hate is sudden, but pathology exhibits every day instances of a similar rapid development of disease, and this development has not come without premonitory symptoms. For some time Olive's behaviour has been peculiar and abnormal. These attacks of mental paralysis, in which she has felt spell-bound and incapable of volition, all point as clearly to mental derangement on her part as the symptoms in her mother's case. In many cases we find disease in a latent form, awaiting only a determining cause to take a pronounced form of activity. Granting the existence of mental derangement, another perplexing particular in Olive's behaviour became comprehensible, and it was so only on this supposition. I am thinking of the girl's statement with regard to St. John's address, which I am compelled to think was untrue. She em-

phatically denied having shown the paper or spoken of St. John to anyone; but how could Mr. Lawson have known where he lived unless she had imparted the information? I have known the girl all her life, and never discovered the slightest prevarication, or any tendency to deviate from the truth, in all these years. Nor do I think it possible that she could tell a deliberate lie, looking me full in the face with every sign of candour, had she not been aided by that audacious cunning which is not an uncommon characteristic of mania. Indeed, with the absolute certainty before me that her statement was a deliberate falsehood, I should be sorry to know that the poor girl was not the subject of mental aberration.

With these matters on my mind, and having at least compassion for the girl I loved so well, I felt in no mood to linger with my patients chatting on trivialities, and so I did my business and managed to

get back to Wrotham by half-past twelve. Having taken the trap into the stable-yard by Mill Lane, I passed through the garden, and approaching the house by the lawn, I perceived St. John and Mary sitting under the veranda, he speaking gravely, and she listening with thoughtful earnestness in her attitude and the expression of her face. Seeing me, St. John, who was leaning forward with his elbows resting on his knees, raised himself and welcomed me with a nod and a faint smile; but Mary still remained in the same pensive attitude, with that expression of profound solicitude unchanged—as if she was too deeply engrossed by her reflections to notice my return.

'I have just come back from the Court,' said St. John, as I joined them; and then I understood why they were so serious.

'Oh,' I exclaimed, 'I thought you were not going till the afternoon.'

'On second thoughts it seemed to me

better to tackle the job at once. Not a pleasant thing to ruminate upon all the morning—sniffing the leek that had to be eaten. And the prospect of apologizing to Lawson was not made more agreeable by the belief that he was poking about at Brixton on Monday to inquire into my private affairs. However, it seems that there was nothing in that to take offence at.'

'Tell me all about it, Hal, and begin at the beginning,' said I.

'Well, I got there about eleven. Asked to see Mr. Lawson. Shown into the old morning-room, and after giving me time enough to realize the unpleasantness of my position, in comes Lawson with his detestable, meek, long-suffering smile. I came to the point pretty sharp, as you may suppose —told him I felt I had behaved badly and wished to do better—asked him to accept my apologies, and help me to overcome the

feeling of resentment on my mother's part, which made me an alien and prevented the intercourse which ought to exist between Olive and me as sister and brother. He heard me out with benign suavity, gave me his flabby hand with a few pious observations on the duty of forgiveness, the sweetness of repentance, the joy of leading home a stray lamb to the fold, and other paraphrases of Scripture which it seems almost profane to repeat, and then came to business. "Had you proposed a reconciliation with Mrs. Lawson a month ago," said he, "I should have had to tell you that it would be labour in vain. But in the last few weeks your dear mamma's disposition has so changed (as doubtless you have heard from our common friend, Dr. Harvey) that I think it quite possible to reunite the broken bond of family affection. Indeed, I have latterly felt so persuaded of this, that only last Monday I went to London expressly to call

upon you, and suggest the very course to which, happily, you have been prompted by the appeal of your own heart." "Yes," said I, "I have been told you called at Arlingford Terrace; may I ask how you discovered my address?" "In the simplest manner possible," he replied, smiling more sweetly than ever. "Our dear Dr. Harvey gave your address to Olive, and it was only natural that the sweet, ingenuous girl should show it to me. Thank Heaven, we have no secrets in this house."'

As I heard this, the hope I had cherished, in spite of my conviction, that some explanation might yet be found to vindicate Olive's truthfulness, died away. Yet even with this evidence before me I found it hard to conceive that Olive—my dear little golden-haired Olive—was a liar. Something in my face must have revealed what I felt, for looking steadily at me, St. John continued after a moment's pause:

'You find it difficult to believe; so did I. It's so easy to doubt the sincerity of those we dislike, so hard to abandon faith in those we love. Knowing from what you told me last night that Olive had promised to show the paper to no one, I fancied he must have obtained the paper from her surreptitiously. But how could he have known that you gave it to her, without her confession?'

'No,' said I, 'she has wilfully deceived us; but it does not greatly matter, Hal.'

'It matters a great deal, Doctor. How can we believe anything of a liar? How do we know that this purse, which I have looked at again and again with love and reverence, was not sent to blind us to the truth?' he asked, taking from his pocket the purse Olive sent him. 'Was it not intended to make us believe that Lawson held possession of my mother's property, and from his known meanness denied her the ordinary pocket-money which girls in her position

have? We know now, by my mother's will, that Lawson has not held the purse-strings.'

'Surely you do not suspect your mother or Olive of avarice?'

'I know not whom to suspect. But this I do know: Olive's messages to me, her professions of love, were false—false as the stories of bewilderment and incapacity which prevented her coming to me or to you, when for some other end it was expedient that she should not meet us.'

'Come, come, Harry!' I expostulated.

'It's no use, Doctor,' he exclaimed, in rising anger; 'I must say what I feel, or feel the more bitterly. A girl who has been dishonest can never be trusted again.'

'That is untrue, St. John,' I protested stoutly, 'and you ought to know better than to let such folly take possession of your imagination for a moment.'

I dared not look at Mary, knowing that she must take this sweeping denunciation

to include herself; yet, looking down as I twiddled my thumbs on my knee, I caught a glimpse of her face from the corner of my eye, and saw that it was deadly white, and that her brows were contracted, as if with sharp pain.

'Well, hear me out, Doctor, and judge for yourself if Olive's professions are to be believed. Lawson asked if I would like to see my mother at once, and I accepting the proposal without a moment's hesitation, he turned and opened the door, stepping back to let me pass. Olive stood there on the threshold, and, upon my honour, I believe she had been listening to what was taking place within the room.'

'Nonsense, impossible!' I cried. 'One may justify an act of deception by the plea of insanity, but not the meanness of eavesdropping. It is impossible. I cannot believe it.'

'If anyone had told me this morning that

my sister was capable of such an act I should have treated him as a slanderer ; but she has given me reason since to believe her guilty of that or any other despicable want of proper feeling. I did not think this of her then ; I was simply bewildered with doubts as I looked at her. She is so changed since last I saw her that I should have passed her in the street without seeing a resemblance to my little sister Olive. Her lips were white and set, her nostrils pinched, her eyes cruel and defiant, her face looked hard as stone—there was not a trace of feminine gentleness or feeling in it—I could not think it was she who, as a child, had been so tender, timid, and clinging until Lawson said, "Your brother has come to see us, Olive."

'Then, a pang of pity running through my heart, I offered her my hand. She shrank back, as if from the touch of a reptile.

'"Don't you know your brother Harry?" asked Lawson, in his sweetest tone.

'"Too well," she answered, hardly separating her lips. "And I know why you are here," she added, her eyes still fixed on mine. "You have heard that my mother has made her will, giving me her property, and you are here to make her reverse it if you can."'

'She said this to you, Harry?'

'To me. The charge would have been simply ridiculous had not the intense passion with which she uttered it made it tragic.'

'Did Lawson say nothing?'

'Oh, he protested against this suggestion in a gentle manner that merely helped to increase the girl's conviction—throwing oil on the flames with the pretence of extinguishing them.

'"You have heard," she continued, "that my mother goes in terror of you. Dr.

Harvey has told you of her weakness ; and you have come to intimidate her and cheat me out of the inheritance I have earned by my devotion to her."

'I could say absolutely nothing. I was too astounded to speak. Lawson poured on more oil.

'"My dear Olive," said he blandly, "how can you say such dreadful things ? I declare one would think that you yourself were actuated by mercenary motives."

'"What if I am ?" she retorted fiercely. "If I don't look after my own interests, what is to become of me when mamma dies? It is not my brother who would save me from starvation. What regard has he shown for my mother or me in the past five years, or the five years before that? What did it matter to him what became of me or her? Not once has he endeavoured to approach us. Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, turning again to me, with a

hideous sneer, "you did come about a month ago, I believe, to ask for fifty pounds. You did not get it; and, to be revenged, you have resolved to make a bold stroke for as many thousands. You call that 'plunging,' I think, in your turf slang. Do you think because we are women we are to be cheated by any shallow pretence you may please to offer? Well, to spare my mother, you shall be paid. Tell me what price you ask, and if it is in reason I will give you my bond to pay it out of my inheritance—on the understanding that you never enter this house again."

'"If you will show me the way," said I, turning from her to Lawson, "I will go and see my mother."

'"You shall not!" she cried, stepping back to the foot of the stairs, and extending her arms to bar the way. And I believe, by the menacing fury in her face, that she would have opposed my passing by personal

violence if Lawson had not by a gesture—strangely authoritative by comparison with his meek demeanour towards me—compelled her to stand aside as we advanced.

'"Go and do your work, you sordid coward!" she muttered as I passed her.'

'Is it possible that she actually believed you had a mercenary end in view?' I asked.

'That is the very question that I put to myself. Heaven forbid that I should charge my sister with greater offences than she has to answer for; but when one thinks that this scene took place in the open hall, that her voice in accusing me was pitched in the high tone of passion, so that every word must have reached my mother's ear in the room above, one is forced to conclude that she was either wickedly careless of the agitating effect upon Mrs. Lawson's feelings, or that she purposely intended to destroy any sentiment of maternal love for me which may have overcome my mother's

animosity. Again, Doctor, when you reflect upon Olive's simulation of affection for me, which this open avowal of her real feeling completely overthrows—of her duplicity in sending me that purse——'

'Enough, Harry! The evidence of subtle cunning is overwhelming. Let us set it aside for the moment. Tell me what happened when you met your mother.'

'Scarcely more than I anticipated. My poor mother was seated by the window, the light falling on her silvery hair. As I entered she rose, tottered forward a step, and then with a faint cry fell to the ground before I had time to save her. The cry was echoed by Olive, who, flying into the room, fell upon her knees beside her mother and snatched her from my arms.

'"You have killed her!" she cried, thrusting me away, and then pressing my mother's head to her breast. Whatever else may have been simulation, the evidence of love

for her mother was unmistakably true. The tears flowed down her cheeks as she kissed again and again the lifeless brow against her bosom.

'"Darling, darling mother!" she murmured between her sobs. "Open your eyes, love. It is all over. He is gone. There is no danger. Come back to me—I cannot live without you. There, rest so. You will be better presently;" and then, as if quite demented, she began to croon over my mother, humming a tuneless air, as if she were rocking a child to sleep.'

St. John broke down, himself overcome by the memory of this incident, and I dared not ask him if his mother was actually dead. Presently he continued:

'Lawson, more practical, fetched a bottle of smelling salts, and applied them, bidding me, in a low voice, seek a servant and bring water. When I returned with a servant, Olive was laughing hysterically over my

mother, in whose cheeks was a faint perception of returning colour. Lawson rose, and beckoned me to follow him from the room.

'"The crisis is over," he said. "Mrs. Lawson will get over this if left to herself. I think you will see the advisability of deferring any further attempts at reconciliation for a week or so." Of course, I quite concurred in this view, and after waiting some time below, to hear that my mother was out of danger, I came away.'

Whilst I was making a few comments on this strange narrative, the door-bell was rung, and the next minute Morton, coming from the house, said:

'If you please, sir, Mrs. Lawson is dying. Mr. Lawson has sent his carriage with his compliments, and will you be good enough to come at once?'

CHAPTER XIV.

JULY FOURTH.

St. John went with me to the Court. We scarcely exchanged half a dozen words on the way. At the gate he alighted.

'I will stay here,' said he; 'you will send out for me if I am wanted.'

Mr. Lawson met me at the foot of the stairs with a smile as cheerful as he could make it.

'How kind of you to come so expeditiously!' said he as we went up. 'Happily the danger is now past. You have heard what happened?'

'Yes. I have left Mr. St. John at the

gate. I know all that took place before he left here.'

'Well, afterwards my poor wife was overcome by a series of fainting fits—at intervals; and they alarmed us greatly, for it seemed as if she must succumb, and that we could never restore the action of her heart. But since sending for you a change for the better has taken place, and now I think we have nothing to fear.'

He raised his finger. We entered Mrs. Lawson's room noiselessly. Olive was sitting by the bedside watching her mother's face. As I approached her she smiled faintly, and then made place for me with a look of shame and contrition in her poor tear-stained eyes. Mrs. Lawson slept; she did not move when I put my hand gently on her temples, or when I took her wrist. Her brow was cool; her pulse beat regularly. She was certainly out of danger from syn-

cope now, and, nodding my satisfaction, I went to the door.

'There is nothing to fear now,' said I to Mr. Lawson when we were outside. 'I should like to relieve Mr. St. John from anxiety on this account.'

'I will tell him myself,' said he. 'May I ask you to wait till I return, that we may discuss what is best to be done?'

'Of course,' said I.

I was about to return to the bedside, when Olive came out. The light from the passage fell fully on her, so that I was enabled to note her appearance. And surely, if anything could move one to pity it was the spectacle of this poor girl, trembling with suppressed emotion, her lip twitching, her face swollen, and her eyes red and puffed with weeping. But that which struck me most with compassion was the submissive, pleading expression that

marked not only her features, but the very attitude in which she stood.

'Your mother will be quite well when she wakes. Nature is restoring her overtaxed strength,' said I.

'I thank you, Dr. Harvey,' she said gratefully. Then, drawing nearer to me, she took my hand, and in a tone of supplication, as the tears burst afresh from her eyes, she asked :

'Can you forgive me?'

'That I will,' said I, pressing her hand warmly; 'we are all liable to be misled in a moment of passion. The really unpardonable are only those who bear malice and cherish revengeful feelings. I will tell Harry——'

'Oh, do not speak of him!' she entreated, clutching her hands one within the other, and trembling violently. 'It is he who makes me wicked. When I think of him I lose all control over my actions, and such

evil feelings possess me as I shudder to recall——'

'But, my dear, a week or so ago——'

She interrupted me with a gesture of remonstrance.

'I know—I know all that you can say. I cannot dwell upon it. For pity's sake do not speak of that. And,' with a pitiful faltering in her voice, 'I want to be as I was, without this burning wickedness at my heart.'

'I will not say another word to you on the subject till you can speak of it yourself with calmness.'

'You will help me to be good,' she murmured, taking my hand and pressing it to her cheek. 'Tell me again from your heart that you forgive me.'

'From my heart I forgive you, my dear, and may it help you to forgive yourself!' Then I drew her to me, kissed her, and spoke a few words that seemed to comfort

her; and we stood there, she nestling against my shoulder, and listening with now and then a little fluttering sigh to my commonplaces, until we heard Mr. Lawson in the hall below, when I gave her another kiss and left her.

'Now, Doctor,' said Mr. Lawson, closing the door softly when he had led me into the morning-room, 'I must ask you, not only as a medical adviser, but as a personal friend, to give me your candid opinion with respect to the condition of those poor women upstairs.'

I shook my head gravely, not knowing exactly what to say; but he helped me on adroitly.

'I understand your reticence,' said he, 'and I think I can tell you what you hesitate to tell me. Now that my wife is out of immediate danger, you feel not more alarmed on her account than you are by this extraordinary exhibition of vindictive

animosity on the part of my stepdaughter Olive ?'

'That is the case precisely, sir,' said I.

'The suspicion of a heartless and mercenary motive actuating her brother—the violent feeling of animosity, so contrary to reason and nature—must seem to you, as it certainly seems to me, incapable of explanation by ordinary deductions of cause and effect. Yet cause there must be.'

'Undoubtedly.'

'Ah !' he exclaimed quickly. 'Your manner in saying that convinces me that you have decided already what that cause is. I ask you to tell me that without reserve.'

'Well, sir,' said I, 'there is but one conclusion that I can form, and that is that both mother and daughter are suffering from the same form of monomania.'

'Is that Mr. St. John's opinion ?' he asked sharply.

'I do not know. I have not mentioned my suspicions to him; but I had come to this conviction before he told me of the extraordinary scene between himself and Olive.'

I then proceeded to give him my reasons for believing that Olive was tainted with hereditary insanity, and, in fact, told him all that I have written here on the subject, with some trifling omissions. He listened to me with earnest attention, nodding acquiescence now and then, but not speaking till I had come to an end. Then he said:

'Dr. Harvey, your conclusions tally exactly with my own. I also have watched with increasing foreboding the growth of these peculiar idiosyncrasies which you have marked in poor Olive's behaviour, and it would be folly indeed to disregard this sudden development of the disease. I feel that something must be done at once; but what?'

'There, sir, I am powerless to help you. You must consult a physician, a specialist—someone who knows far more on this subject than I. At the utmost I can only advise the most ordinary measures for alleviating present mental strain.'

'What measures are they? To find a specialist and obtain a consultation must take time.'

'I should recommend a change of scene—a few weeks at the seaside.'

'Do you think that is necessary?' he asked, apparently not well pleased with the suggestion.

'It cannot fail to be beneficial — the movement and variety found at a watering-place at this time of the year, in addition to the invigorating effects of sea air, must be good.'

'They seem so contented here.'

'That is not a good sign with patients of a hypochondriacal temperament. There

is nothing to divert their minds from brooding over imaginary evils.'

'You are quite right, Doctor,' he replied, with a sigh of resignation. 'It must be done somehow, though it is more difficult than it may seem to you. Extreme parsimony is, I suppose, a feature in my poor wife's mental derangement, and my own means are extremely restricted; that will explain my reluctance. However, the difficulty is not insurmountable. Where should you advise me to take them?'

I recommended Scarborough or Whitby; and he, promising to be guided by my advice, and thanking me with every appearance of sincerity for speaking so openly, led me to the door, where we shook hands and parted.

St. John was pacing the road outside. The carriage that brought us took us back. On our way I recounted all that had taken place, putting my view of the case before

St. John. He accepted my theory at once as the only one that could explain the contradictory character of Olive's behaviour—indeed, I think he would have welcomed any solution of the mystery which acquitted his beloved sister of the sordid calculation her conduct had at first indicated. We were very silent over our late lunch, Harry and I, and it would have been a gloomy repast but for the tact of Mary, who kept up a lively flow of chat about trifles which would have surprised anyone not knowing the nature of good women, whose presence of mind and apt resource rarely fail them in an emergency. One thing we knew well enough: it was not want of feeling that made her lively at this time. How deeply she felt for St. John I learnt by many a covert glance she shot at his troubled face, many a lingering, wistful look, unseen by him, full of compassionate solicitude.

'I shall have a turn at that chimney-

piece, Doctor,' said Harry, when he rose from the table.

'Do, my boy,' said I, 'and when I've had my customary doze, I will join you and take a lesson.'

So he strolled off to the workshop with his hands in his pockets, and his head bent in a brown study. Mary took her wicker work-table out under the veranda, and I, having let down my study blinds, composed myself to sleep in my comfortable arm-chair with my fingers knitted on my chest.

But I did not drop off with my usual readiness, the events of the morning revolving persistently in my mind, and I was just beginning to think that it would be better for me also to go and take a turn with the chisel and mallet, when I heard St. John's voice on the terrace outside—the French windows being open and nothing between us save the turned Venetian blinds.

'It's no good, Mary,' said he; 'I haven't the courage to take my physic.'

'Physic?' she repeated interrogatively.

'Manual labour—about the only cure for mental trouble. At least, I thought so until it struck me, after standing before the work for ten minutes with my hands in my pockets, and growing more sick every moment at the thought of taking up the tools, that I was a fool to overlook a remedy ten times more pleasant than the other is distasteful. So here I am.'

There was a scraping sound as if he were drawing up a chair to face Mary, and then he asked:

'What is that you are doing?'

'Hemming a handkerchief.'

A short pause, and then his voice:

'May I smoke a pipe?'

'Oh, do!'

A long pause, the sound of a match striking, then another interval of silence.

'I am waiting to hear what this remedy is you spoke of,' said Mary at length.

'Why, this is it—to sit here and watch you working, and dream—a sort of forgetfulness.'

'Would not Dr. Harvey tell you that this is no remedy at all?' she asked quietly. I felt inclined to cry 'Hear, hear!' but I thought it wiser to let things take their own course, with a happy belief in Mary's ability to deal wisely with the case.

'Would he not tell you that it is dangerous to take laudanum, and a waste of time at the best to deaden a nerve that must trouble you till the tooth is out? That is what I was told once. Let us talk about your mother and sister.'

'You see, Mary, I'm so miserably helpless — that's the trouble. If there were only something to do, I don't think I should lack the courage to do it. But I can do nothing—absolutely nothing. It is not

only an awaking sense of duty ; it's something more than that—aching pity for poor Olive ; bitter remorse for neglecting opportunities that I may never have again. If I had behaved like a decent brother, I might have seen and checked the growth of this disease—certainly it could not have taken this dreadful form. But now I cannot undo the evil arising from my neglect. It would be cruel even to try to see her again while she entertains this horrible feeling towards me, wouldn't it ?'

'Yes.'

'What can I do ?'

She made no reply for a minute, then she asked :

'Do you think that it really is a kind of insanity ?'

'I am loath to believe that I have justified her hatred or suspicion.'

'Oh, you cannot think I implied that ?'

'What other alternative is there ?'

'I do not know.'

'Yet something, I feel sure, was in your mind when you threw a doubt upon the Doctor's theory.'

'I was thinking that some more hopeful explanation might be found if more were known of your mother and sister and Mr. Lawson than we at present know.'

'There, again, I am powerless.'

I almost fancied I could hear the sound of Mary's needle in the silence that ensued. After awhile St. John spoke again.

'If that were all I had to bear it would be enough.'

'Tell me what else there is?'

'What else, Mary? — am I not losing you? I shall have no sister after to-morrow.'

'Are you going so soon?'

'What excuse have I for staying here now? What pretext have I for coming down here from time to time as I expected?'

'Is any pretext necessary?' asked Mary quietly.

'None, perhaps, except what my own conscience demands. But you will write to me now and then, Mary. Eh?'

'Yes—at Brixton?'

'Oh no! I must get away from there sharp. I couldn't stand the place without you. I must go back to my old quarters.'

There was a sharp 'clink,' as of a pair of scissors falling on the ground; then an embarrassed exclamation on both sides, followed by a faint apology on the part of St. John, from which I am disposed to think that in picking up the scissors simultaneously their hands had met. And I fancy St. John must have taken advantage of this accident to clasp Mary's hand and retain it, for when he spoke again his voice was thick, and passionately low, as he said: 'Unless you wish me to stay here, Mary.

Come, you shall be the arbiter of my fate. Tell me if I shall go or stay ?'

'Tell me first what will follow if you stay.'

'What will follow ?' he exclaimed, after a moment's pause, in a voice as harsh as before it had been tender, an abrupt movement of the chair showing that he had risen to his feet. 'What will follow ? Why, I shall loaf about, and sponge on the Doctor, and waste more years of my life an idle, thriftless vagabond, with the chance of blasting another woman's life. Oh, forgive me, Mary—forgive me, for I'm beside myself with this trouble,—snatching at poison to slake my thirst ! Forgive me, dear sister—for there's more of the fool than the villain in me.'

He must have turned his back and moved away, for his last words were almost lost to my ear. Presently I heard a little sob and the movement of a chair, and when I

went outside Mary was gone. Her work-basket was gone also, so I knew she had entered her own room, and kept away from her sanctuary.

St. John had spoken of going away 'after to-morrow,' but he told me last night that he should leave this morning, and I thought it advisable not to dissuade him. When I met Mary before breakfast I informed her that St. John was going away by an early train.

'This morning!' she said, with mingled surprise and regret in her voice.

'Yes, my dear; he can do no good here now. It is better for him to get back to his regular occupation.'

She assented with a movement of her head, but she said nothing, and there was a look of abstraction in her beautiful eyes which left me in doubt as to the nature of her reflections Hers is one of those faces

which have a quiet power of reserve and convey an impression that they tell far less than they feel. But at breakfast she again kept us from stagnating by her brisk fire of leading questions that compelled conversation ; when we bade good-bye to St. John hers was the least lugubrious countenance, and if this simulation of indifference was hypocrisy, then I say hypocrisy is a respectable virtue, for surely it was intended to remove any twinges of conscience that St. John may have felt for his loss of self-command yesterday afternoon.

As soon as he was gone she asked me if I would take her with me on my round of visits.

'Morton can stay at home to do the garden, and I can walk the pony up and down while you are seeing your patients,' she suggested.

I agreed to this proposal without demur ; for though it was decidedly unprofessional

and was scarcely consistent with her beginning housekeeping duties in a methodical way, I felt that it would be extremely dull for her to be left alone at this juncture. Little did I suspect the motive she had for making this demand, and setting aside those duties which she herself had looked upon as important ; but I perceived it when, on coming out of Higham Court from my visit to Mrs. Lawson (who is better than I expected to see her), I found Mr. Lawson and Olive standing beside the phaeton in conversation with Mary.

CHAPTER XV.

JULY FOURTH TO SIXTH.

I had learnt from Mrs. Lawson that her husband and Olive were gone for a walk, and it was a great surprise to me to see them talking to Mary Smith, who was a perfect stranger to them. After the customary civilities were exchanged, I said, still holding Olive's hand:

'You must permit me to introduce Miss Mary Smith.'

'Oh, I have already introduced myself,' said Mary, laughing, and then she explained how, just as Mr. Lawson and Olive had passed through the gate, my pony began to back in a most unaccountable manner, and

with such persistency that, had not Mr. Lawson at once responded to her cry for help, the chaise must have been turned over.

'Well, this is the most extraordinary thing in the world!' I exclaimed. 'I never knew Bess to do such a thing before.'

'We are very much obliged to her for giving us the pleasure of being of service to Miss Smith,' said Mr. Lawson, with much more warmth in his tone than was usual.

'And I quite forgive her putting me to fright for the advantage of making your acquaintance so speedily,' said Mary, turning to Olive. And, then, as Mr. Lawson was pointing out how the reins had caught over the shaft and so led to the accident, I heard her continue: 'I do hope you will let me profit by this accident to see you again quite soon and improve our acquaintance. I have been so accustomed to society that I

fear I shall find the country intolerable unless I have one or two friends of my own sex to talk to about trifles.'

These words made such a strong and uncomfortable impression on my mind that I could not find a word to say for two or three minutes after parting from Olive and Mr. Lawson—which parting was accompanied with smiles and civilities on both sides. However, thinking it would be better to say what I thought upon this matter without reserve, I then spoke :

'My dear Mary, I had the misfortune to overhear a few words which I think were only intended for Olive St. John's ear ; and I can't tell you how sorry I am to know that you already think that life in the country may be intolerable to you.'

'Dear Dr. Harvey !' she exclaimed, in a tone of remonstrance, at the same time smiling in my face, 'that was only a *façon de parler*.'

'That *façon de parler* must have embodied a truth.'

'Not an atom,' she declared, speaking now with impressive gravity.

'Then, why you should go out of your way to say it is incomprehensible to me—as incomprehensible as Bess backing across the road without cause.'

At this Mary's gravity collapsed, and she laughed outright, as hearty a laugh as I could have wished to hear at any other time; and then, her eyes still twinkling with mirth, she asked:

'Do you really believe that was an accident?'

'Why, you said it was, Mary.'

'Ah,' said she archly, 'that was another *façon de parler*.'

'Well, my dear,' said I, nettled, 'your *façons de parler*, translated into honest English, are downright falsehoods, according to my perception.'

'Don't you think the French term sounds a little less unpleasant?' she asked, still in that sly tone of suppressed mirth.

'Hum!' I grunted. 'So Bess did not turn round of her own caprice?'

'Not a mite. She wouldn't have stirred if I hadn't pulled the rein with all my force and used the whip into the bargain.'

'And what on earth did you do that for, my dear?'

'Must I make a full confession?'

'I beg you will, Mary; for I am mystified beyond endurance.'

She was silent for a minute, and then, in her serious vein again, she asked:

'You want Mr. St. John to be a happier man, don't you?'

'Ay, to be sure I do.'

'And, loving him, it grieves you to think that you can do nothing to help him?'

'Ay; I couldn't get to sleep for devising expedients; yet I could grasp none to meet the case.'

'Feeling like this for him, we can sympathize the more deeply with him, whose trouble is of the same kind, only greater. One can see that he is thinking and thinking of his sister Olive; that he is tortured with remorse for having neglected her; maddened by his inability to undo the mischief that has been wrought, as he thinks, by this neglect.'

'He has done all that lay in his power; he can do no more.'

'No; *but we may.* If we could draw nearer to Olive, excite her affection, win her confidence, we might discover the cause of this unnatural aversion to her brother, and, knowing the cause, might discover means to counteract it.'

'If you can do that, my dear, you will make Harry a happy man.'

'And, with God's help, I will,' she said with fervour.

'When did this notion occur to you, Mary?' I asked, my heart leaping with joy.

'Yesterday, when he spoke to me on the subject of his unhappiness; but I dared not tell him what I hoped to do, lest I should fail.'

Here, again, the keynote of her character seemed to be struck in this indication of self-control and reserve, the fine feeling that restrains promises, and seeks only to perform a good act.

'And now you know,' she added in a light tone, 'why I asked you to take me with you this morning, and why I tugged at Bessy's head when I concluded that the gentleman and lady entering the gate of the Court were Mr. Lawson and Olive, and also why I indulged in downright—what did you call them?'

'My dear, you may call me a downright

dolt for not crediting you with greater wit than I possess.'

I laughed heartily at my own expense, and then, sobering down, I asked her what opinion she had formed of Mr. Lawson and Olive from her brief interview.

'Olive seems to me particularly sweet, open, and simple—very much as I pictured her from Mr. St. John's earlier description and yours. Certainly I should not suspect her of worldliness and self-seeking, and quite as little of insanity. She has not the peculiar look in the eyes when you look into them which most girls have when they are affected in that way.'

'Why, my dear, it is not a common malady amongst young women, and yet you speak as if you had seen many.'

'Perhaps I have,' she observed, in a tone of abstraction; and then, as if to get away from some unpleasant reflection, she said: 'She seems very timid.'

'That is but natural, mixing, as she does, so little in society. You are thinking that her shyness may be an obstacle to intimacy, perhaps?'

'Yes; but I fancy Mr. Lawson may help us to overcome that obstacle.'

'Mr. Lawson!' I exclaimed. 'Why, what makes you think that?'

'The help he has already given us,' she replied with a smile. 'He was very much more anxious to strike up an acquaintance than Miss St. John.'

'Ah, to be sure, he's a man,' said I.

She silently assented with two or three significant little nods.

'And what do you think of Mr. Lawson, Mary?' I asked.

'I don't know what to think. I know so little about men, for one thing; and, then, this one does not bear his character in his face, like Mr. St. John or you. One feels that one could never quite know his true

nature. But I think I should look to him for a clue to any mystery there may be in Higham Court.'

She was silent for a moment; then, with evident reluctance, she asked me if I thought that Mr. Lawson flirted.

'Not that I know of. He's a married man, you know, though that, to be sure, is no—well, you see, if he did anything of that kind he would have to be very guarded in his conduct, because of his position as a retired clergyman, and that sort of thing.'

'Which would account for a great deal that is unpleasant in his face. Can you tell me how he employs his time?'

'I believe he studies a great deal, and, then, he assists in the parish schools—especially the Sunday-school.'

'The very thing,' she said, in an eager, low voice. 'You shall point out the Sunday-school as we go back.'

'Why, my dear?'

'Because I intend to go there next Sunday and offer my services as a teacher.'

I wonder even now what was in the girl's mind.

* * * * *

This morning Mary declined to accompany me, so Morton went with me on my rounds as usual. However, I resolved, if I could, to help on the good cause; though I fear I have stuck my foot in it, and done more harm than good by my attempt. I called at the Court, and found Mrs. Lawson quite herself again, and at her tambour-frame in the drawing room. While I was there Mr. Lawson and Olive came in. Mr. Lawson made many inquiries about Mary Smith, Mrs. Lawson and Olive also showing great interest in her. Though, of course, they were too polite to put any direct question as to Mary's position and antecedents, they indirectly tried hard to satisfy their curiosity in these matters; however, I was

a master for them at fencing, and let them know no more than I wished them to learn. Then, seeing the evident wish of Olive to meet her again, I said :

'We shall be quite alone after two o'clock ; now, if you will come and spend the afternoon with us, I assure you Miss Smith will be not less delighted than I.'

'I shall be very happy indeed to come,' she replied frankly ; 'that is,' she added, turning with a questioning look to Mr. Lawson, 'if I can be spared.'

'I am afraid, my dear Olive, that is impossible,' said Mr. Lawson, with the sweetest regret on his sickly face, 'for you know that we are to start for Whitby on Monday morning, and we must of necessity be fully occupied this afternoon and evening.'

'I did not think of that,' said Olive. And if I might judge by the expression of surprise in her face and in Mrs. Lawson's,

this was the first intimation they had received of their speedy departure. And this leads me to suspect that by my ill-advised precipitancy I have made Mr. Lawson aware of our desire to win the confidence of Olive. When I told Mary of my surmise, she said : ' If this is indeed the case, it is evident that we are on the right track and must follow it up.'

However, to take things in their order of succession, I must go back and narrate a curious discussion I had with my friend Fawcett.

He dropped in as we were sitting down to lunch, and his look of perplexity when I introduced him to Mary was curious to see. He looked over his glasses at me and then at Mary, then under his glasses at the cut flowers with which Mary had decorated the table, and for the first time in all the years I have known him offered a kind of apology for calling at this time.

'I hope I do not intrude, Doctor,' said he, in a subdued tone, most unlike his usual uncouth delivery. 'If I had known my friend entertained a visitor, Miss Smith, I should certainly have gone home to dinner.'

'Not knowing, of course, what kind of a visitor you should find,' I hinted.

'Although home on a Saturday,' he continued, 'in consequence of Mrs. Fawcett's inveterate habit of clearing up everything at the end of the week, is not a pleasant place, and I never open the scrap pie without expecting to find a stick of sealing wax or a length of red tape amongst the extraordinary collection of odds and ends which composes the dish. That is why, if I can, I look up my friends on Saturday, and invariably about this time.'

'I hope the prospect of meeting Dr. Harvey's housekeeper will not deter you from coming again,' said Mary, after ordering a cover to be laid for Fawcett.

'On the contrary, there will be the greater inducement in knowing that if the Doctor is not at home I may find someone still more agreeable.'

This was a very gracious speech for him to make, but I feel assured it expressed no more than he felt at that moment, as Morton, having set his chair, uncovered a fine roast fowl. I fear my friend has a rather hard time of it with his large family, for his manner is not of a kind to bring him clients. However, no one could have behaved better than he during lunch, and he was most courteous to Mary — though he must be a bear indeed who is dull to the charm of her personal appearance and sprightly conversation.

'Doctor,' said he, when we went into my study for a cigar, 'your housekeeper is a clever young woman. I won't ask how you picked her up or where you picked her up, but I will say this, you have shown more

gumption in selecting her than I would have given you credit for.'

'Yes,' said I, with a sigh of satisfaction, 'I feel that my life is brighter and better for her.'

'And now, having shown me one sensible thing you have done, tell me what act of folly you have committed to counterbalance it.'

'None, that I'm aware of, since I went to Maidstone to see you.'

'Yes,' said he, reflecting as he cut the end off his cigar, 'I liked her at first sight. Believe in first impressions. Like her long face, and those deep, well-set eyes.'

'They are really beautiful eyes, aren't they, Fawcett? So honest and earnest, yet so playful at times, and at others so wonderfully tender.'

'More behind 'em than ever you are likely to discover, or I either.'

'That's exactly my impression. They

make you conscious of a reserve force. To me they are like beautiful flowers that one knows instinctively must bear perfume.'

'Hum,' he said, between two whiffs of smoke—'wonder what she's done.'

'Done!' I exclaimed indignantly, and yet not without a fear that he knew more of Mary Smith than he choose to discover—'what do you mean by that?'

'Beautiful flowers, perfume—hum!—some are deadly, aren't they? Death to inhale their perfume?'

'I can't understand you a bit. Just now you led me to suppose that you admired Miss Smith.'

'Done something—of course she has. Who hasn't? You've done something. I've done something. Everyone's done something to merit punishment, only we've had the wit or the luck to hoodwink justice. What does your friend Shakespeare say about a whipping-post?'

'Miss Smith is a young woman. We are men, and not young, either.'

'Admire her, of course I do. I like her —that's more. But that doesn't alter the case. She's not perfect. Differs from other young women in degree, not in kind. A clever woman never does a wrong thing unless she is compelled to do it; a stupid woman is everlastingly doing wrong because she can't help it.'

I gave a grunt as the most suitable answer to this assertion, and lit my cigar.

'Young woman!' he continued, after a silent whiff or two. 'Old enough to have a history—and pretty enough, too. They can't escape temptation. Bad thing for a girl to be pretty. I thank heaven every night of my life (when I think of it) that all my girls take after their mother.'

I thought they would have been quite secure from temptation if they had only

inherited their father's moderate amount of good looks, and so I told him.

'Nice girl,' said he, taking no heed of my observation; and this aggravating peculiarity of his always gives him the advantage in argument. 'If she gets into trouble, Doctor, let me know. I'd put myself out of the way to help her cheat Justice—legally. How about that other friend of yours—St. John? Any developmemt in that affair?'

I told him of St. John's visit to Higham Court and the result, dwelling particularly on the unaccountable change in Olive's sentiments towards her brother.

'Well, you're not surprised at that, are you?' he asked, tilting his head back to look at me through his glasses.

'Why, to me it's the most astonishing part of the whole mysterious business!' I exclaimed.

'And to me it's the most commonplace termination to a most commonplace story.

Divest the affair of all the sentimental trappings you have wrapped it up in, set the facts down in plain black and white, and there's not an incident that you won't find repeated in the papers fifty-two times in the course of a year. We need not go over them again. I told you what I thought of Miss Olive. There's a girl of the sort I *don't* like. Fair-haired, selfish, and stupid. I knew when I was making out that will that she would turn her back on this brother as soon as she found all the property was to be hers. And I see no reason why she shouldn't, for I cannot see that he has done anything to deserve a penny-piece from her.'

'You're wrong, Fawcett,' said I with conviction. 'You're blinded by stupid prejudice, based upon nothing but a perfectly irrational dislike to the colour of a girl's hair. And your own argument proves it. For whereas, according to your own theory,

Olive should be stupid, her own act, still following your theory, should prove her to have the cunning of a Borgia in the art of deception.'

'I don't know that she has deceived anyone except you, and that would not call for a great exercise of wit.'

'You have seen her but once; can you allow that anyone else is as good a judge of character at first sight as you?'

'That depends upon the person,' said he, with an open sneer in his meagre visage.

'You shall name the person yourself.'

'Well,' said he deliberately, 'I would trust the perception of a clever woman rather than my own—your Miss Smith, for instance.'

'Done!' I cried, delighted to find him step so readily in my trap. 'Miss Smith has seen her, and her opinion is diametrically opposed to yours.'

This silenced him. He regarded me

fixedly for a minute, then, turning in his seat, he set his arms on the back of his chair, dropped his jaws into the palms of his hands, and stared out of window rolling the cigar from side to side in his lips as he cogitated. He hadn't a word to say in his defence, and I was never more delighted with a triumph in argument in all my life. I said not a word. He was the first to speak. Without changing his posture, he at length said:

'And what explanation does Miss Smith offer of these contradictory circumstances?'

'None; but she says that if the mystery is to be solved, we must look to Mr. Lawson for the clue.'

Smacking the back of the chair as he raised himself and turned, he exclaimed:

'She is right! Ten to one she is right, if Miss Olive is not the designing person I have taken her to be—and certainly such a deep-laid plotting does not tally with her

appearance of ordinary stupidity. Go on; tell me what happened after St. John's visit.'

I described the alarming effect the visit had upon Mrs. Lawson, which obliged Mr. Lawson to send for me.

'Stop a bit,' he said. 'From a medical point of view, what was the cause of these fainting fits?'

'Emotional effect upon a possibly feeble heart.'

'Dangerous?'

'Undoubtedly, if proper means are not used to restore the action of the heart.'

'That is to say, if remedies were not applied, she would die.'

'Possibly—probably.'

'Mr. Lawson had applied these remedies and restored his wife. Nevertheless, he sent for you, and I dare say he asked your advice—what advice did you give?'

'I advised him to take Mrs. Lawson

and Olive to the seaside for a month or so.'

'The very thing he was scheming for!' said he, smacking the chair-back again. 'I knew you must have done something foolish. Now, this is what will follow: Mrs. Lawson will have another fainting fit, and the proper means to restore the action of the heart will not be applied. She will die, and in a very short time after Mr. Lawson will make Miss St. John his wife!'

'What!' I exclaimed. 'You would have me believe that Mr. Lawson will murder his wife to marry her daughter—for murder it will be, if he suffers her to die of syncope by withholding the remedies that would bring her back to life! The idea is monstrous!'

'Monstrous or not, he will do it, or I'm a fool, and Miss Smith's another.'

'But to marry Olive, she must be a consenting party.'

'Why shouldn't she consent? Has she a

lover? Aren't they always together—she and Mr. Lawson?'

'Olive marry her stepfather—absurd! Impossible!'

'Not at all impossible, nor absurd either, he retorted, sharp as a needle—for when he chooses, I observe, Fawcett can follow an argument without divagations. 'It seemed to you, I dare say, impossible—monstrous—what you will—that Mrs. St. John should marry Lawson so soon after her first husband's death. But she did, you tell me. And the same influence Lawson brought to bear upon the mother he will exercise upon the daughter. History repeats itself—especially in the case of successful criminals, who invariably work the same trick twice. Do you think he would meekly submit to his wife leaving all her property to Olive, unless he had decided that she would be preferable as a wife to the mother?'

'He has no control over his wife's

property. She is so close with her possessions that he doubted his ability to take her to the seaside—knowing her objection to spending money. He told me so.'

'And you believed him?' He turned his head with a laugh which was half a sneer. '*He* short of means! Why, I learn that up to last June he has been keeping a separate establishment, not a hundred miles from Maidstone, that must have cost him seven or eight hundred a year.'

I recalled Mary's hesitating question as to whether Mr. St. John 'flirted,' and was silent.

'And you've sent them away,' he continued, in a tone of disgust, 'to the seaside, where Lawson may make love to the daughter preparatory to killing the mother.'

'Why, hitherto you have maintained that Lawson was only an ordinary commonplace man; but now you represent him as a calculating, cold-blooded scoundrel.'

'That's it,' said he, rising; 'we must believe one thing if we deny the other, and I am disposed to believe,' he added, with emphasis, 'that Miss Smith's conclusion is the correct one.'

END OF VOL. I.

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